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REVIEWS

QUAKE III ARENA

Whether you're a newbie or a seasoned, rocket-jumping veteran, Quake III Arena™ is going to push your skills to the limit. Q3A is powered by the most advanced 3D engine ever, and it features 30 challenging maps that show off the intensely realistic, organic look of the Arena. But don't get caught staring at the scenery, or you'll end up as part of it.

Quake is known for the intensity of the Fragmatch, and this time not even the single-player gamers are safe. Q3A's single player game IS a Fragmatch. The computer opponents are armed with highly advanced artificial intelligence and whatever they steal from your fragged remains. These aren't the predictable, learn-how-to-kill-them-once and move on bots you remember. They learn from their mistakes and get better as the game goes on. Let's hope you can say the

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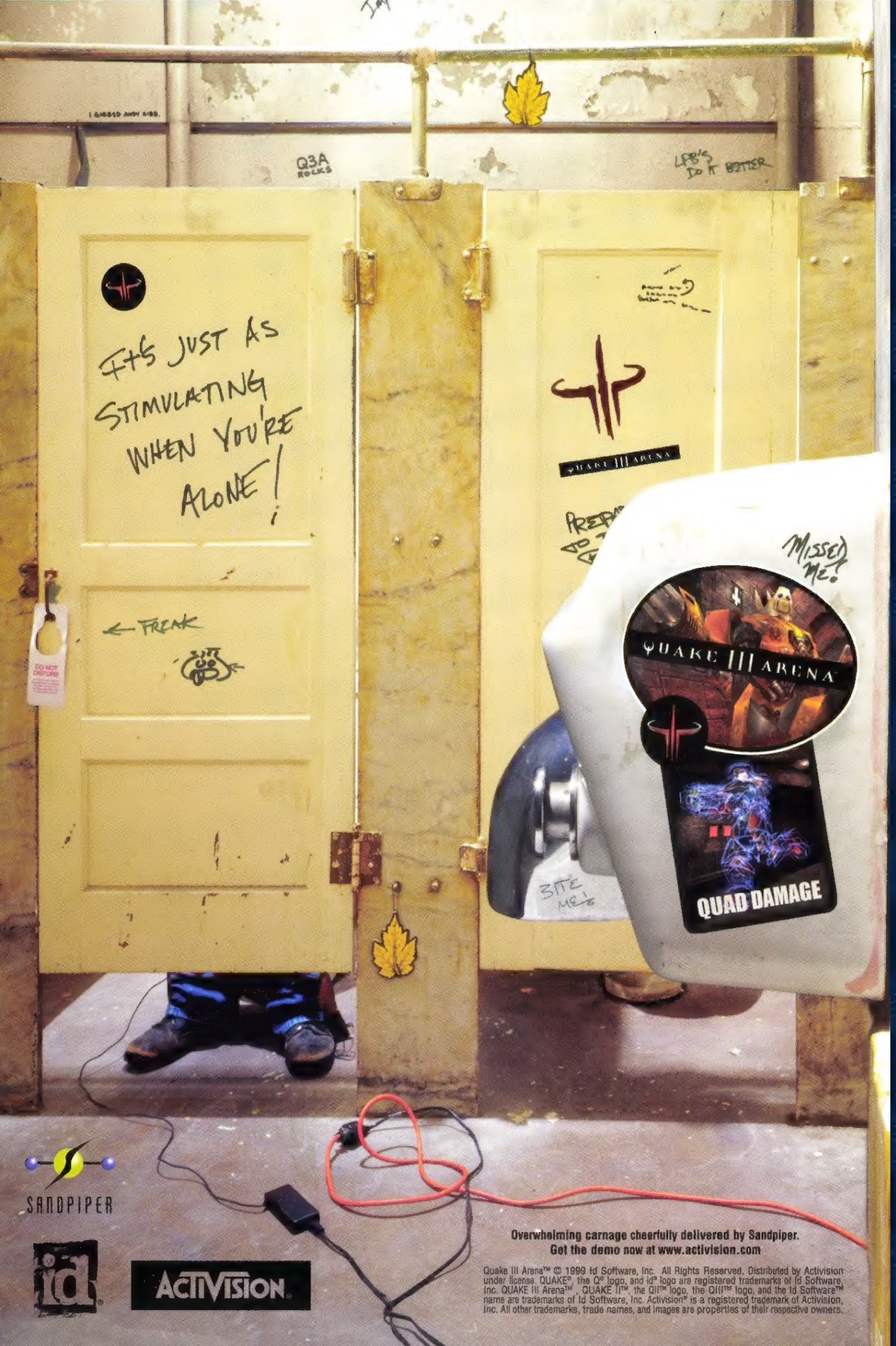
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PC GAMER
VOLUME 6 • NUMBER 12 • DECEMBER 1999

Miss Me?

***Duke Nukem Forever* kicks off our greatest Holiday Special ever!**

Cover illustration by David Gallagher, Blizzard Entertainment

Cover Story

66 For the past two years, information about this highly anticipated game has been so closely guarded that you'd think national security would be at stake if any word were to leak out. Here at *PC Gamer*, we're always willing to go above and beyond the call of duty, so we stormed the 3D Realms stronghold to bring you the first updated look at what *will* be one of the hottest games of the new century.

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EA takes the racing genre into a massively multiplayer, persistent world. Think of it as *EverQuest* for car fanatics.

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With the help of our strategy, you'll have those terrorists trembling!

256 Jane's USAF
These combat tips will have you ruling the unfriendly skies in no time.

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189 **If you're shopping for a new PC, don't get taken by buying one of those overpriced, underpowered off-the-shelf boxes. Greg shows you how easy and economical it is to build your own system. Plus, the Sideways Page gets turned on its side, as we present the Trinity Page; we think you'll like the change.**

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Letter from the Ed.

Ever realize "if" is the middle word in "life"?

What do you want for Christmas this year? Here at *PC Gamer*, there was only ever one item on our wish-list — the exclusive first look at the most anticipated game currently in development, *Duke Nukem Forever*. After we pestered them for weeks on end, George Broussard and his crew at 3D Realms agreed to play Santa Claus and open their doors to show us how the new-look Duke is shaping up. We're happy to now pass this gift along to you, so mosey on along to our exclusive preview and prepare to be blown away. Thanks, George.

Congratulations to Robert Vashko of New Orleans, LA, for being the first person to E-mail me with the correct source of last month's Ed. Note headline "What if Elvis is Alive...and We're All Dead?" It came courtesy of Bono, and the song is "Elvis Ate America" from U2's album "Passengers, Volume 1."

This month's Ed. Note headline prize is a copy of Microsoft's *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings*. To win it, all you have to do is be the first person to send an E-mail to *gary@pcgamer.com* with the source of the headline above.

Enjoy the Holidays...

Gary Whitta, Editor-in-chief

"...resistance is futile."

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"A virtually flawless masterpiece"

- Future Gamer

"... will shake up the gaming landscape"

- CNET

" a next-generation game in every sense..."

- The Adrenaline Vault

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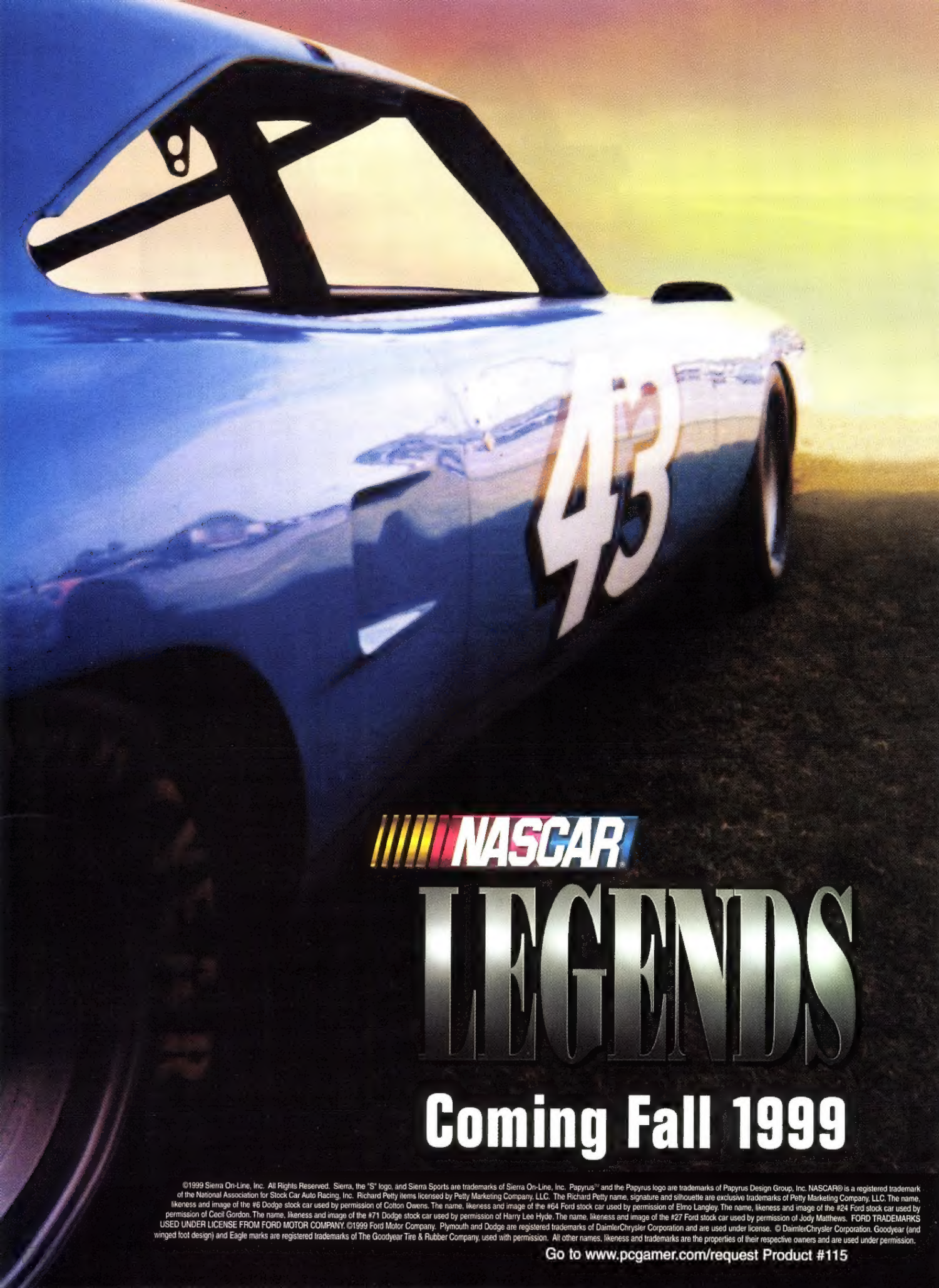

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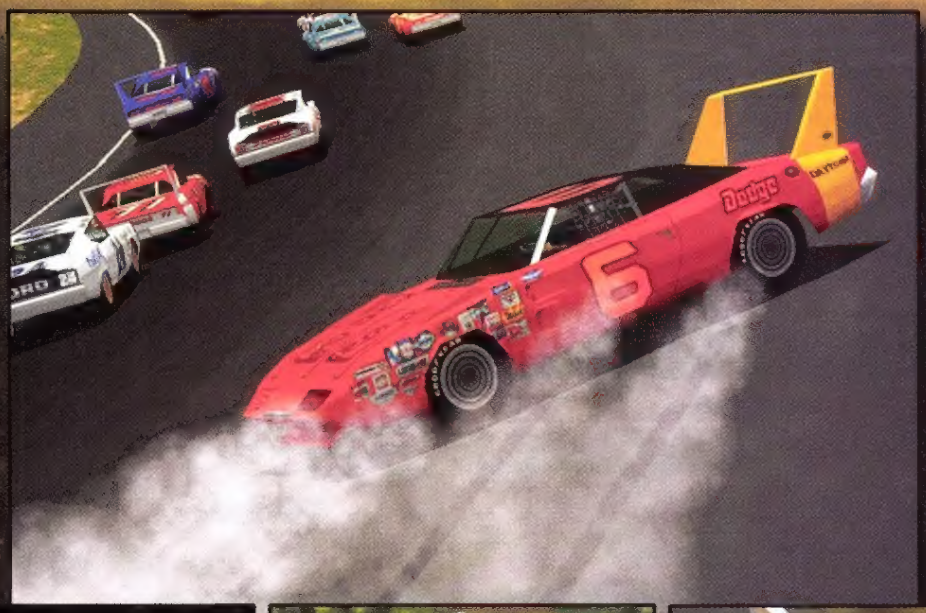

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THE NEW *PC GAMER* DISC EDITOR IS SO HELLA SMOOTH WE CALL HIM "WAX PAPER"

After a three-year tenure as Disc Editor, Michael Wolf has departed the *PC Gamer* offices in search of greener pastures. Sensing imminent collapse in the well-oiled *PC Gamer* machine, Jeremy Williams abandoned his duties as Webmaster for *PC Gamer* Online and rescued the staff from ruin and pandemonium, thus single-handedly facilitating the completion of the December issue. You're welcome.

As you can see, a rich crop of demos has been harvested for you this month, including an exclusive *Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear* demo! To enjoy all of the demos, just slide the disc into your CD-ROM drive and wait for the handsome new interface to appear. Choose a game, read the README, and launch the install. It's that simple.

Unfortunately, we can't provide technical support for the games contained on the disc. However, if the disc itself is scratched or defective, go to *http://support.imaginemedia.com* and order yourself a new one free of charge!

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FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND THE *PC GAMER CD*

SUPPORT

Click here to connect directly to *http://support.imaginemedia.com* for CD support.

ADD-ONS

Try these add-ons for the latest games, including new levels and maps.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The new interface requires Internet Explorer 4.0 or higher. If needed, run ie4setup.exe from \engine\explorer.

UTILITIES

Click here for a list of the utility programs included on the current CD.

DATABASE

Curious about past demos or reviews in the magazine? Check here for answers.

INSTALL

When you're ready to install the displayed demo, click this button to launch the setup program. It might help to close the interface at this time.

COCONUT MONKEY

What's that crazy Coconut Monkey up to nowadays? Find out by clicking here for Fan Art, Coconut Monkey's web site, and more!

THE README

View and Print the readme file for the selected demo. The Readme file usually contains technical information, control keys, and more.

THE DEMOS

Quickly and easily jump to the demo of your choice. Move the mouse over the picture to see a drop-down description of the demo, and click the picture to go directly there.

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RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR

EXCLUSIVE PCG 1999

- INSTALL R... E... R... M... EX
- TECH SUPPORT ...
- CATEGORY Ac...
- COMPANY ...
- REQUIRED Pentium 233 ...

Ladies and Gentlemen, Team Rainbow is back! After the success of the original *Rainbow Six*, Tom Clancy's team of crack game designers has gone to work creating the most immersing and suspenseful set of levels yet. In this demo, you get to sample one of the missions from the full game, complete with single and multiplayer modes.

It's your job to lead hostages out of the clutches

Tom Clancy, always scheming, has concocted a sinister plot. During an exhibition of Egyptian antiquities at New York's monolithic Metropolitan Museum of Art, Egyptian extremists seize the building and make hostages of the many innocents contained therein. Immediately, the situation becomes a high-profile media event, and television trucks surround the American landmark. Of course, such a public show of aggression calls for the best in anti-terrorist response forces.

That's where you come in. Surely you, commander of Team Rainbow, can get it done.

Arm yourself and your team, plan a course of action, and proceed. Immediately upon entering the game, a frightened and well-dressed escapee will emerge from the front door. Don't shoot him. Instead, console the whimpering man and stay sharp upon entering the lobby. This isn't your typical first-person shooter, so take the corners slowly. One shot kills in this game.

Check your heartbeat detector occasionally to see behind walls, and don't forget about your grenades. Also remember to run the opposite direction when you throw one, or you might easily frag yourself. Above all else, don't let any hostages die, or the mission is over. That means keeping quiet and having a sharp eye.

Try hooking up with some people on Mplayer or the Zone for some multiplayer action. It's well worth the sign-up time, as you'll probably learn some valuable anti-terrorism tactics. Now get playing, soldier!

This silly terrorist should have paid more attention to Team Rain... and less to this lovely Egyptian artifact

NHL 2000

- INSTALL ...NHL2000\NHL2000DEMO.EXE
- TECH SUPPORT (650) 572-2787
- CATEGORY Sports
- COMPANY EA Sports
- REQUIRED ... MB RAM ...

Throw away your televisions, sports fans. The look of *NHL 2000* is so phenomenally cinematic that it actually feels like watching a televised match. The best part? You're in the game! In fact, in the full version, you'll be able to scan in your face and create your own characters! Talk about interactive.

In this demo, you can play the Buffalo Sabres against the Dallas Stars, live at the Dallas Reunion Arena. Both single and multiplayer modes are available, so grab a friend or an AI buddy and strap on your skates. Get to know the four action keys: shoot, pass, speed burst, and deke. Speed burst is especially helpful when making a fast break after steeling the puck on your side of the rink. Be careful not to skate offsides, though. The referee has a keen eye, and he will bust you. The AI players are equally sharp, and should provide hours of fun.

Put the biscuit in the other guy's basket and what do you get? Goal!!

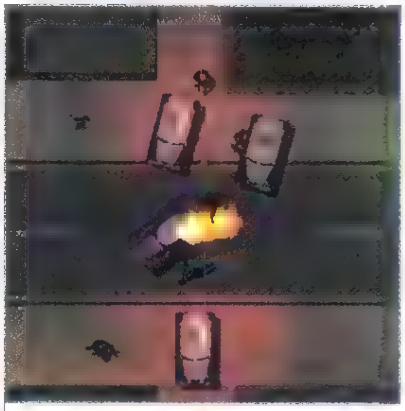
The sequence of camera shots and pans are different with each game, including those during the opening segment, which adds further replayability. Look to score on one-timers by shooting directly off of a pass. Then admire the 3D scoreboards that fly onto the screen as action shots fade between each other in the background. After intermissions, players march out from the locker room to the applause from the crowd. The goalie limbers up with a few stretches, and then its up to you to win the face-off.

Get ready for an evening of live NHL goodness!

If you score goals, your teammates will appreciat... being invited to their weddings and cookout:

GRAND THEFT AUTO 2

Now here's a sequel to a classic with an infamous history. The original *Grand Theft Auto* struck consumers and critics alike as a game that didn't pussy foot around the issues. In fact, some countries took the trouble to ban the title from their storefronts. The object of the game? To become the most sought-after criminal freelancer in the city.



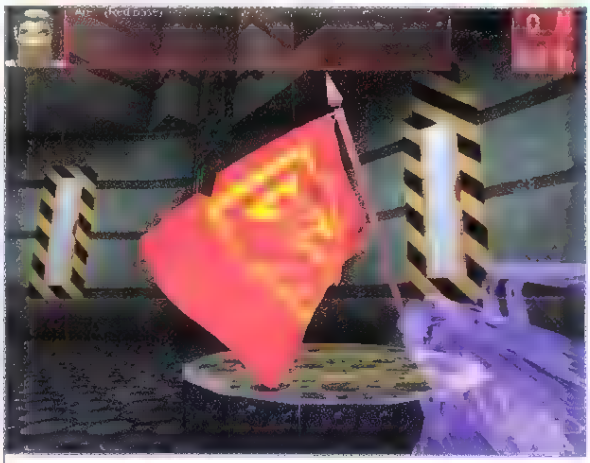
As you'll see in this demo, the sequel has not given into media pressure it's more carjacking, pistol wielding, cop evading, payphone-answering goodness (or, in this case, badness). The trademark top down perspective remains the same, but this time the engine is hardware-accelerated with improved colored lighting and fire effects. More of the same, only better

At the start of the demo, you learn that you are strapped with dynamite (a gangster tactic to make you buy the full version). It explodes after five minutes, which is enough time to complete two or three missions or begin to learn your way around the city. Don't worry though, in subsequent games you can answer different phones, accept new missions, and essentially have a completely fresh game

Given the time constraint, you'll want to scoot around the city quickly. For this, try the cars with the big "Z" painted on top. If you can't find one, it might be time to hijack a ride from the five-0. Besides, cop cars have working sirens, the fun of which makes them well worth the risk of being caught. If you really want to have some fun, find a fire truck and nose down some pedestrians.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Is the *Unreal Tournament* demo better than the *Quake III Arena* Test? You tell us. It certainly took the Internet by storm upon being released, and servers have been filled with players ever since. This is the full demo, complete with Direct3D, Glide, and OpenGL compatibility, in addition to software mode for those without a 3D accelerator



Without question, it's one of the most feature packed demos we've seen in quite awhile. It offers five modes of play. Tournament Deathmatch, Tournament Team Game, Domination, Capture the Flag, and my personal favorite, InstaGib Deathmatch. Four Deathmatch maps are included, as well as one Domination and one CTF

If the sheer number of options isn't enough for you, try playing with the bots. Believe it or not, the competent and adjustable AI is almost as much fun as playing with people. In team games, your allies will back you up while the enemies verbally taunt and lure you into ambushes. Of course, all of this is backed up by the *Unreal* engine, which has never been shy with beautiful graphics

IMPORTANT NOTE This demo requires you to install DirectX 7.0 Don't ask us why, it just does. To make your life a little easier, we've included it on *The CD* Just look in the root directory for a file called DX70ENG.EXE Who knows, you might even notice some slight improvements to other games as well

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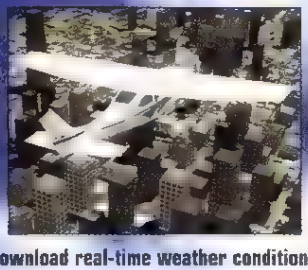

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Possession... Naked and defenseless, Bob uses his only weapon and takes possession of the first character he sees, a worker.

Realizing that the worker does not have security access to leave the room, Bob lowers a 5-ton tank on an unsuspecting co-worker to create a commotion.

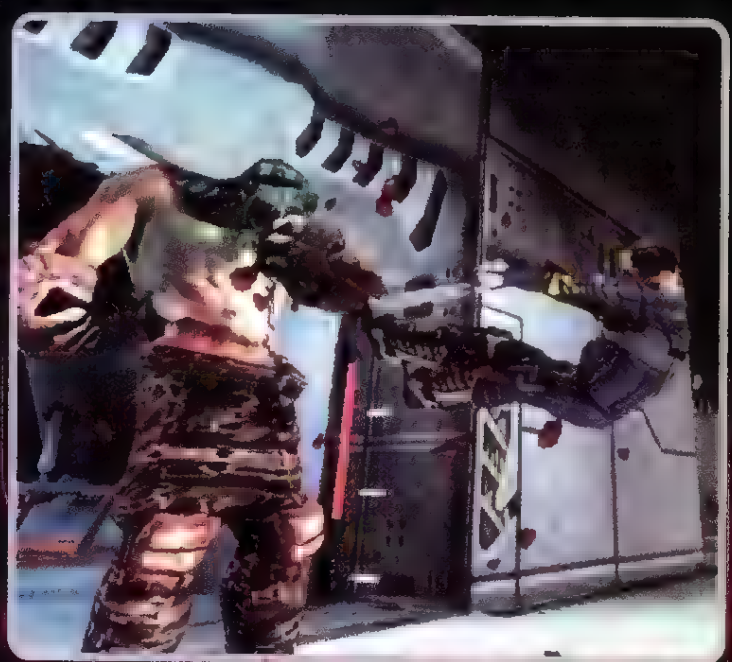
Then he can possess the medic sent in to aid the crushed co-worker, medics have security access.

Now through a warehouse door, Bob still needs access to the lab where he believes he'll find some answers.

Bumping the medics body, Bob realizes that Cops have access to the lab.

Cops also have laser sighted GUNS! Now heavenly!

While being scanned at the door Bob attracts some unwanted attention.



The huge 15 foot genetically engineered Behemoth rips the cop's heart out and like a rag doll tosses his lifeless body across the room.

After seeing the awe-some power displayed by the behemoth, who needs a cop. Bob takes possession of the Behemoth and is ready to KICK SOME ASS!

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END OF THE WORLD PROMOTION

The end of the millennium is upon us. The two thousandth year after Christ. Who better to celebrate it with than "Bob", God's favorite cherub?

Where is the biggest new years celebration every year? New York City, Times Square. Shiny, Interplay and Messiah want to send one lucky winner, and friend, to the biggest party on Earth. Witness, first hand, the apocalypse. If it is the end, you might as well be partying when it happens!

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- PC ACCELERATOR

"It's this act (possession) of not just taking on a body, but an actual character that makes the game so unique."
- CORE MAGAZINE

MESSIAH

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DELTA FORCE 2

- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]
- [illegible]

Think *Rainbow Six* played in vast and wide-open spaces, and you've got the idea behind *Delta Force 2*. You lead an elite unit of armed forces into a long-range sniping battle and, just like in the real world, one shot kills — you or the enemy.

Before entering the game, you'll probably want to make a few changes to the default setup. First off, if you have a 3D accelerator, go to the settings menu and switch to hardware mode. You might also want to change the default movement keys to your typical *Quake* setup, as the game requires you to crouch and stand at a moment's notice.

It's a little difficult to figure out what you're supposed to be doing in this demo, so here are a few hints to get you started. The game begins with your team parachuting behind enemy lines. Your first objective is to take out the encampment to your left, so try steering toward it and find a nice sniping spot on the hill. Once you take care of business, follow your comrades to the southwest and prepare to attack the enemy base.

Once you find it, lay low. There are three or four towers, each with snipers who would love to add another orifice to your body. Once the coast is clear, your mission is to locate the enemy codebook somewhere inside the communications center. Once that is done, leave a satchel charge so as to erase your fingerprints.

Be sure to check out the intro trailer from the main menu. For some reason, it doesn't automatically play when launching the demo.

DISCIPLES: SACRED LANDS

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Need a break from the frantic and nerve-wracking pace of real time strategy games? Well, mosey on over to *Disciples: Sacred Lands* and try some good old fashioned turn-based goodness. The demo gives you the opportunity to play as two races from the four that will ship with the full version. Each of them has the same objective, but slightly different motivations.

As the Empire, you must defeat an evil wizard, Voss, before he overthrows your kingdom. He already has convinced a growing number of villagers to revolt against you, and in little time he will usurp your power. In order to beat him, you must travel the lands and capture the city of Venusia.

The Undead Hordes, roused solely by greed, lust for Voss' magical orb. In order to obtain it, they must also capture the capital city of Venusia.

Upon entering the game, you'll want to create a modest army to survey the land surrounding your palace. To do so, enter your palace and click on the "Army Screen" icon. Right click on characters to learn about them. Once you've assembled an army, send your posse out by clicking the "Exit Leader" button. Click some place on the screen. Flags will appear to mark the path, and you can travel as far as the blue ones in the current turn. Try to capture as many towns as possible. As soon as a temple is built, they can be used to heal and train soldiers.

End each turn by tapping the button in the lower right corner of the screen. Then watch your feeble opponent try to squash you like a bug.

RAYMAN 2: THE GREAT ESCAPE

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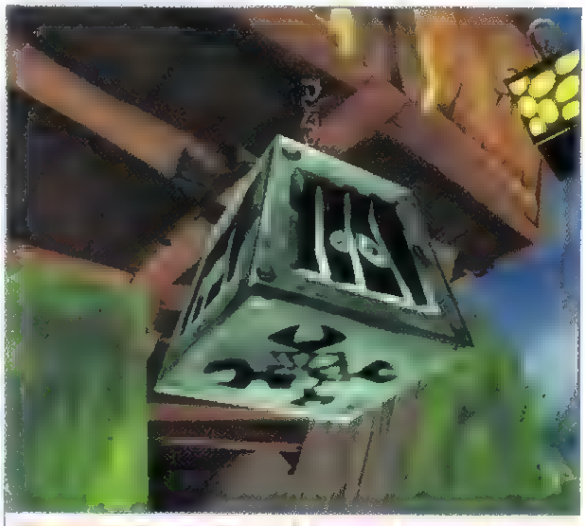
The menacing pirates have done it again, and it's up to Rayman to recover the primordial energy of the world! (We don't make this stuff up, folks.)

French games have always had a style all their own, and the fine folks at Ubi Soft have adhered to the tradition. In this *Zelda*-like adventure, you guide Rayman through a colorful and stylish world to collect hundreds of hovering yellow dots (the primordial energy of the world, obviously). This demo is one complete level from the full version.

Be sure to familiarize yourself with the controls in the README before playing. As you begin, a pirate is lobbing flaming barrels at our hero, so keep Rayman on the move. You'll notice a boarded door in the middle of the map. There's no way to open it, but perhaps you can enlist the help of old Blackbeard?

Before you jump down that hole, take a look around. There are a few secrets in this demo that can be easily missed if you don't take the time to explore and experiment. They usually lead to a caged yellow dot (grinning like Alice's Cheshire Cat) that can be freed with a well-placed shot with Rayman's gun. Now go save those defenseless specks!



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DARKSTONE

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Darkstone is like *Diablo* with a pinch of the graphics from *Dungeon Keeper 2*. In this extensive demo, you control not one, but *two* adventurers as they explore the grassy lands above and the dungeons beneath.

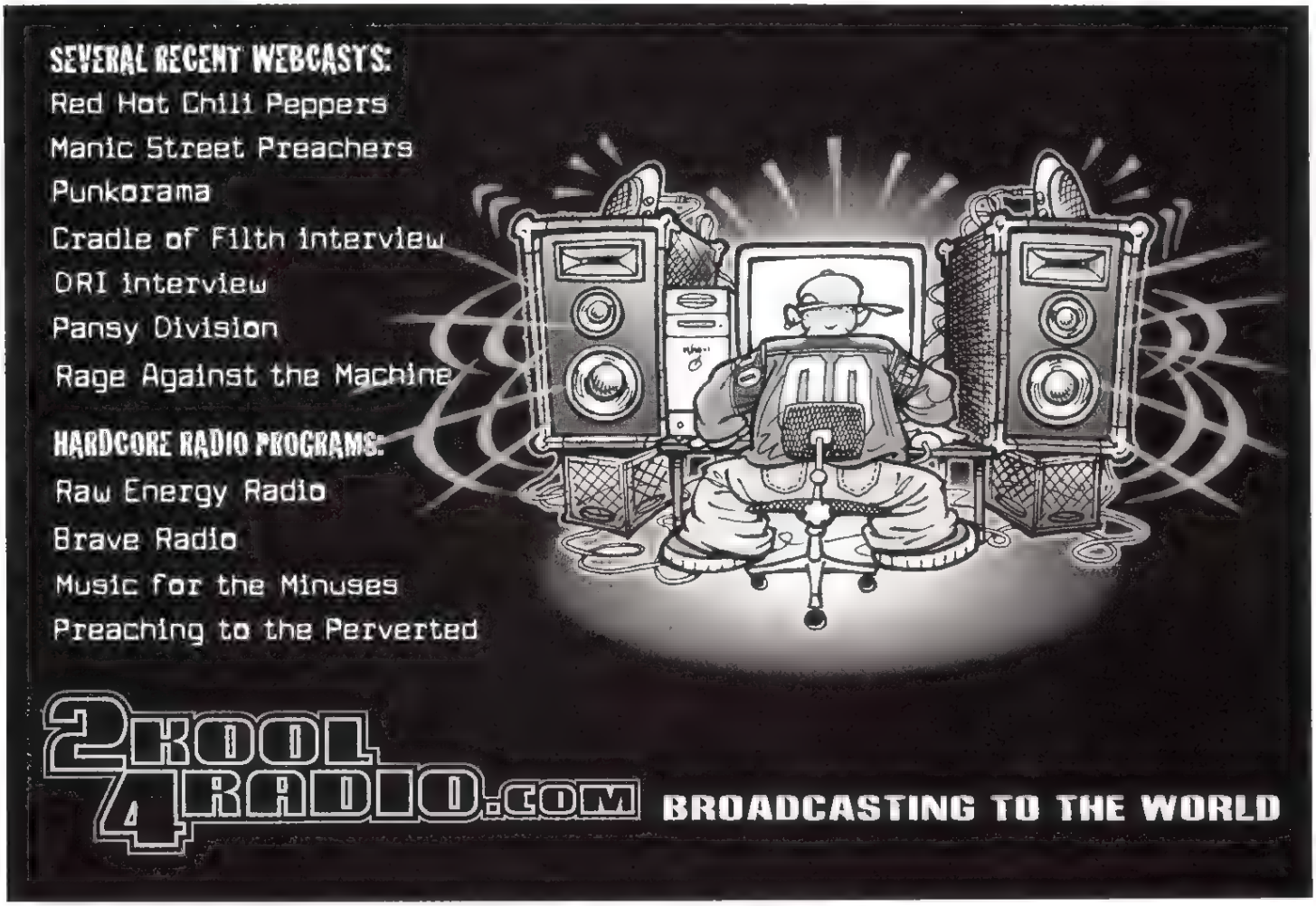
The README file is very informative, and since you can't reconfigure keys from within the game, it is highly recommended that you give it a once over before embarking into the shadows outside of town.

You can click on the map to walk long distances — even to places you haven't yet seen.

The demo starts you off in a village filled with lots of people who can help you begin your quest. Take a walk around and talk to everyone. You'll be back to make a few purchases after you've won a few gold pieces. If you listen carefully, you'll also hear of a quest for a mysterious Path Book. Outside of town, you'll also hear talk of something called the Horn of Plenty. These are leads for you to follow, in case you feel like being a real adventurer.

Once you leave town, I recommend exploring the entire map before heading down the first ladder you come across. It will give you an idea of the scope of the demo, and also give you a few more characters to chat with. Also, before heading down, be sure to stock up on apples and turkey legs, or your heroes will be whining about their hunger in no time.

Try to use characters equally so that they both prosper from experience. Once they rise in level, right-click their portraits to apply the experience points. Obviously, the male should focus on strength, while his companion excels in the magical arts. Good luck!



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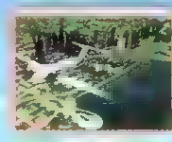

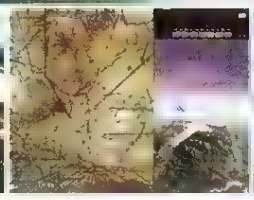

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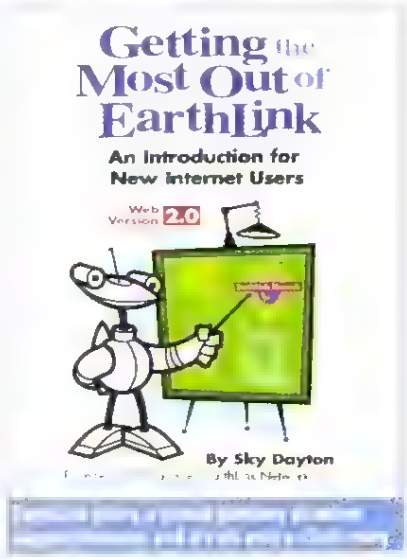

EarthLink Network, winner of the 1997 *PC Magazine* Editors' Choice Award for Best Internet Service Provider, supports all kinds of Internet games and even has its own online gaming site (*www.thearena.com*). EarthLink membership includes unlimited Internet access, unlimited E mail, a free 6MB of space for your own web site, a free sub scription to *bLink*, EarthLink's newsletter, a fully customizable Personal Start page, and your choice of browser

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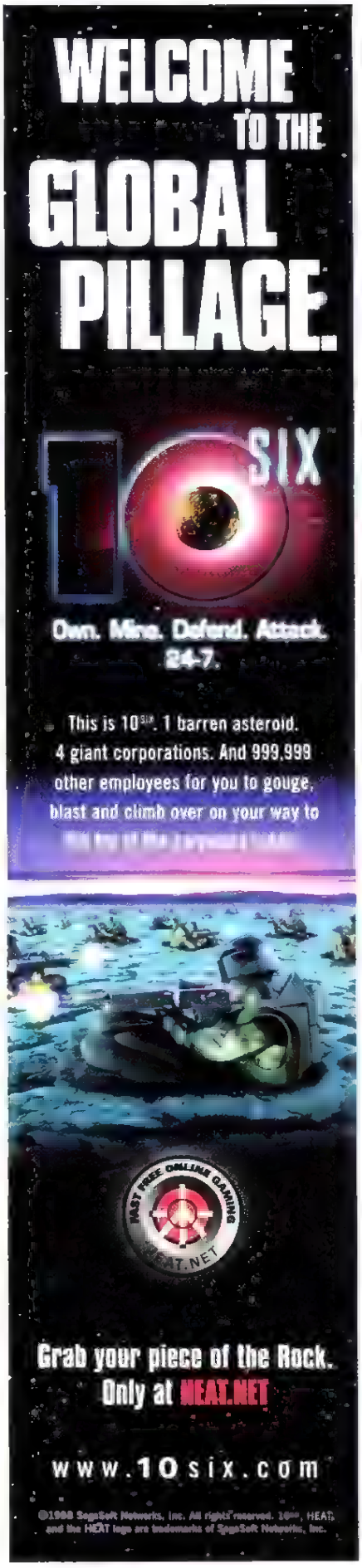
MindSpring uses its Pipeline+ software to give Windows 95 users a direct TCP/IP connection to the Internet, using the Microsoft Dial-Up Adapter. That means any of those online games that require a TCP/IP connection will work beautifully with MindSpring. If you use Windows 3.1, MindSpring uses Connect rather than the Dial-Up Adapter, which gives you a 16 bit TCP/IP connection, so you can still play those online games (as long as they don't require a 32-bit connection). For the online gamer, Mind-Spring offers all you need to start frag ging your friends!

With its affordable pricing and a whole slew of services available, Mind Spring is a good starting point for getting onto the Internet. Best of all, if you install the software from *The PC Gamer CD*, the $25 launching fee will be waived. Talk about service!

HAVING PROBLEMS?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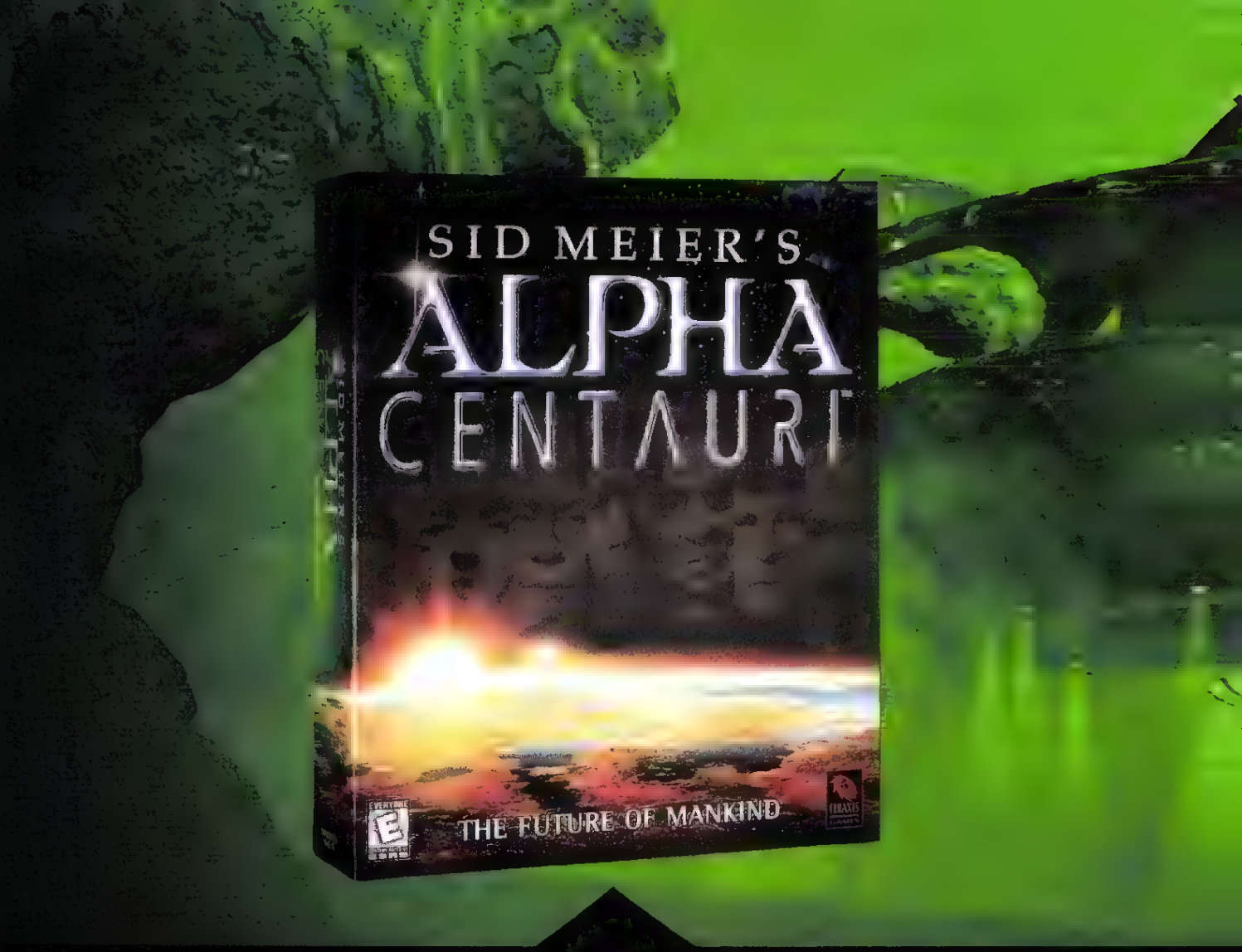

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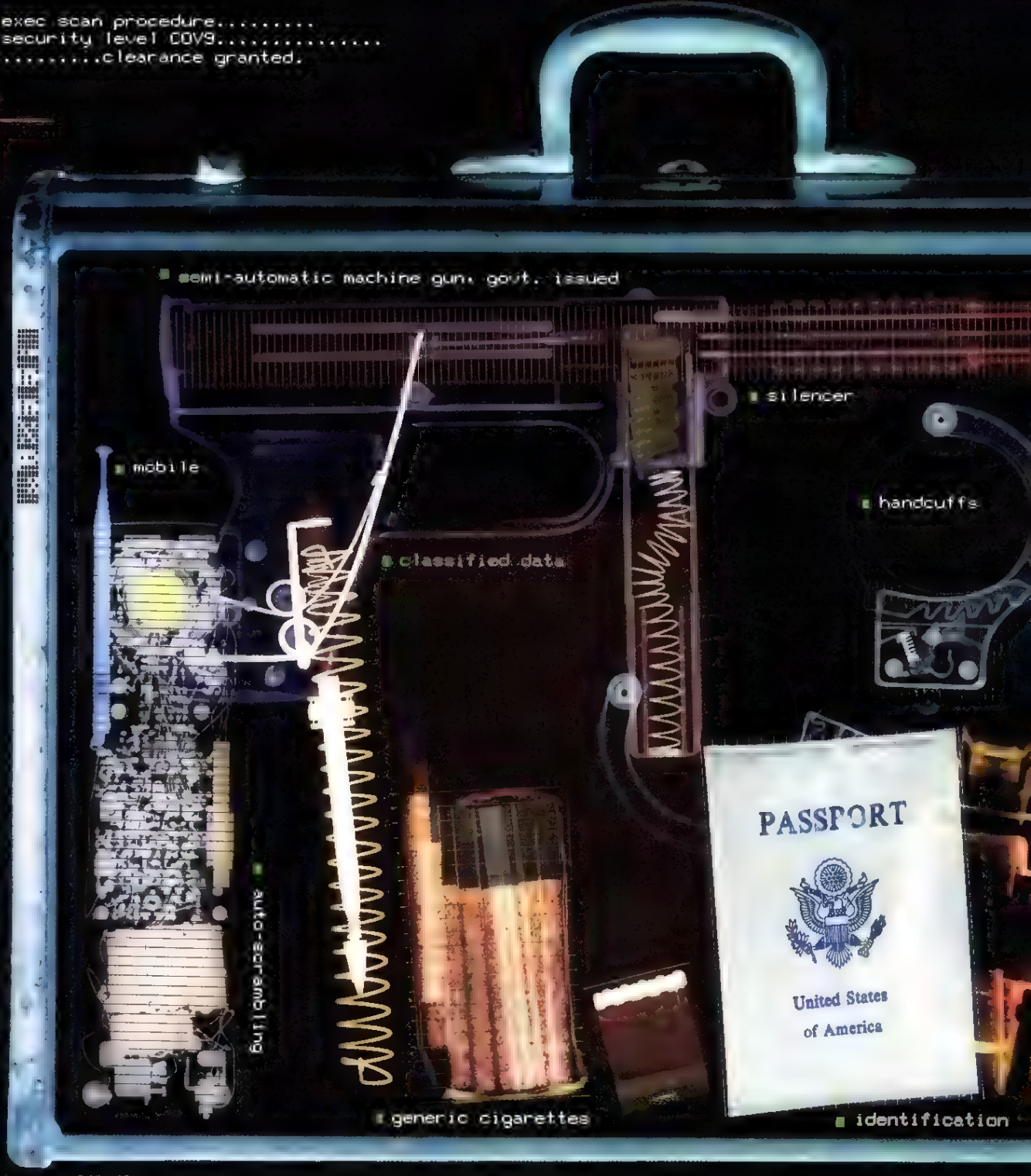

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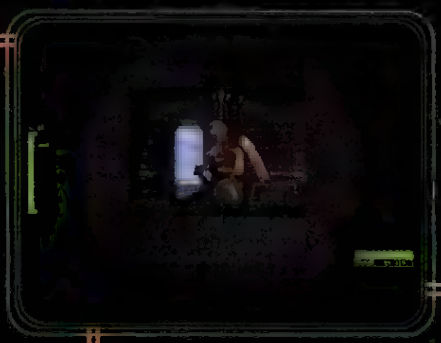
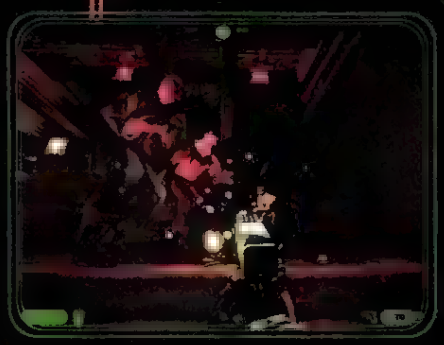
Sniper View in Kosovo





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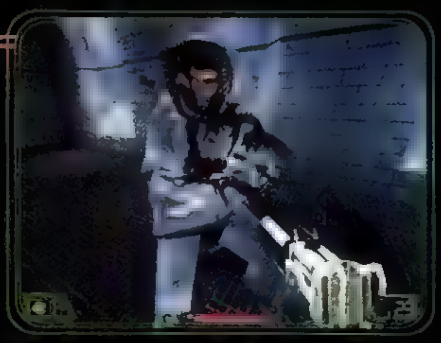

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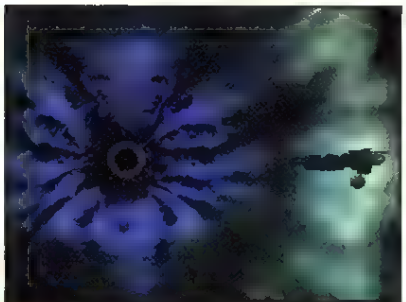
Starlancer

Digital Anvil's debut takes the Roberts clan back to familiar territory

It's been a looong while since *Wing Commander* creator Chris Roberts made industry headlines by announcing that he was leaving Origin Systems to set up an ambitious new multimedia development studio called Digital Anvil. Roberts and his newly formed crew worked in relative secrecy for a while, shunning publicity until they had something worthwhile to justify it, and while a few screenshots and snippets of information have since leaked out regarding the three DA games known to be in development, gamers are starting to become a little impatient and asking "Where's the beef?"

Here's the beef. *Starlancer* will be the first Digital Anvil game out of the gate, and it will surprise few to learn that it's a high-tech 3D space combat game along the lines of the Wing Commander series that earned Roberts his fame and fortune. What will surprise more people is the news that the game's development is being led by another Roberts — Chris's younger brother Erin, who most recently produced Origin's excellent *Privateer* sequel *The Darkening*.

So why a return to such familiar territory as space combat? Shouldn't we expect something a little different from the Roberts clan's bold new outfit? "The space combat genre allows game designers a huge amount of creative freedom," explains Erin Roberts. "We can create epic stories which are played out throughout the game. We can show huge space battles where the player is the hero, rather then an actor on a movie screen. In space, unlike re-creating a part of our history, there are very few rules on how the game must look and play. For me, it's like starting with a set of building blocks, and deciding what you want to build, rather then having to follow a blueprint created by someone else. And there is still a lot of potential in this genre as long as technology keeps on progressing and designers introduce new features and stories. Space combat sims — at least the ones I'm interested in working on — are not just about the graphics, missions, etc. They're another way of telling a story. The story is the tool which combines the experience the player has in the cockpit and pulls them through. With *Starlancer*, we're trying to create an experience which immerses the player in the story. The player must not only enjoy playing the missions, but must have a need to win, to see the conflict to its fruition and save their people."



Wormholes like this one allow ships to travel huge distances instantaneously.

Set 150 years into the future, *Starlancer* puts forth a universe in which world power is shared by two rival

Starlancer boasts graphics light years beyond anything seen in current 3D space combat sims. If you think this looks good, just wait until you see the sucker move! It's slicker than snot.

Attacks on enemy capital ships will be a crucial part of many *Starlancer* ops.

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Space combat

DEVELOPER: Digital Anvil

PUBLISHER: Microsoft, (800) 429-9400, *www.microsoft.com*

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 75%

RELEASE DATE: March 2000

IN A NUTSHELL: Digital Anvil's long-awaited debut is a huge 3D space combat epic in the style you'd expect from brothers Erin and Chris Roberts — huge engagements, varied missions, gorgeous graphics, and a strong cinema-style story line. On the surface it may look like another *Wing Commander* clone, but there's a ton of interesting new features, and nobody does these games better than the Roberts bros.!

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL? It looks and plays fantastic so far, and there's a lot of buzz surrounding the multiplayer co-op mode, which will allow players to form their own squadrons and play through the entire story-based campaign game as a team. It's also the prequel to the much-anticipated *Freelancer*, so it should give gamers an early glimpse of what to expect from that title.

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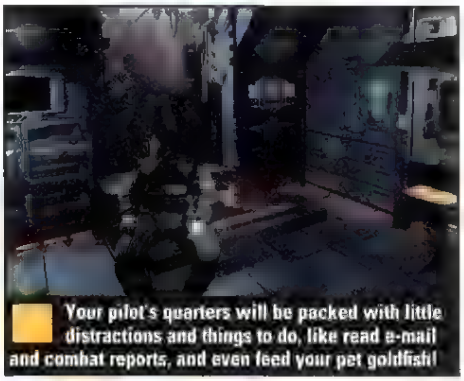
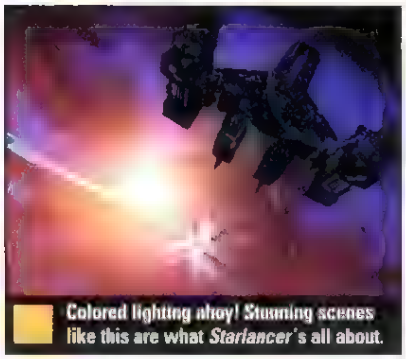
The computerized Heads-Up Display featured in *Starlancer*'s cockpits is perhaps the most detailed and responsive yet seen. And there's no cockpit metalwork to obscure your view!



Your pilot's quarters will be packed with little distractions and things to do, like read e-mail and combat reports, and even feed your pet goldfish!



Colored lighting ahoy! Stunning scenes like this are what *Starlancer*'s all about.

coalitions cobbled together from the old east and west superpowers. With a new cold war beginning on Earth, the two coalitions have taken to the stars and begun a battle to control the resource-rich solar system The player steps into the action as a newly recruited pilot assigned to the oldest carrier in the Alliance fleet (sound familiar?) as the good guys prepare to hit back in retaliation against a surprise attack by the nefarious Coalition And thus the fun begins, unfolding over the course of 30 different combat missions

Roberts is keen to point out that the *Starlancer* team is going to ensure that their game is not dismissed as just another *Wing Commander* clone. "*Wing Commander* basically created this genre, and the majority of people who worked on the original and the series now work at Digital Anvil," he says. "A game in this genre is always going to draw comparisons, but with *Starlancer*, we're trying to push the genre much further. The story is about humanity battling itself, drawing on elements and conflicts which humanity has seen through the past two centuries. The story runs through all the gameplay, whether through cinematics, onboard the player's carrier or inside missions. The missions themselves are much more advanced than games before, and the player through his actions, can change events in the story and future missions Also, one of the main components we wanted was the ability not only to have deathmatch multiplayer in the game, but to allow players to go through the whole story and all the missions with their friends cooperatively."

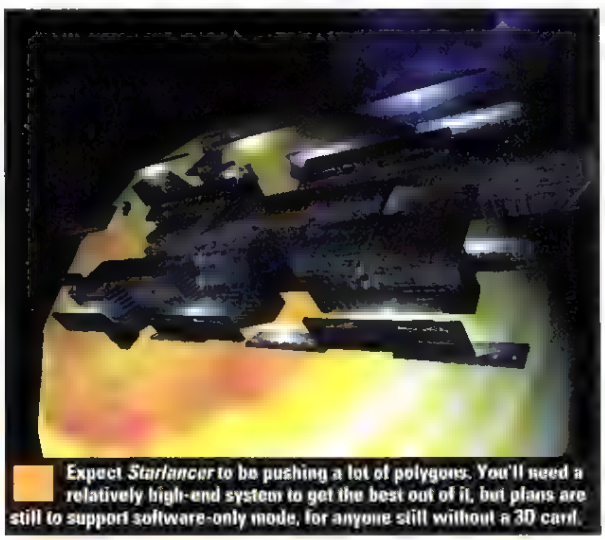
> **"A game in this genre is always going to draw comparisons to *Wing Commander*, but with *Starlancer*, we're trying to push the genre much further."**
>
> ELLIS ROBERTS, PRODUCER

Roberts is pinning a lot on *Starlancer*'s cooperative multiplayer mode. "In most games, although you can play through a story on your own, the multiplayer aspect only allows you to play a single mission, or a limited campaign," he says. "With *Starlancer*, I wanted a group of friends to be able to play through the same epic storyline as a single player. With our editor, missions are created so they can work as single player games or as multiplayer games with up to four friends. This will allow players to move through the story together, helping each other out in the missions. Being able to live through the experience with more then yourself is going to add a lot to the game."

Starlancer has been in development at Digital Anvil for two years, and by the time you read this, all the game's code should have been finalized. The rest of the time up until the game's release date in March will be spent fine-tuning the game's look and feel. "A lot of work has been put into the look and feel to really give the player a great experience," says Roberts. "We have tried to populate space to a huge degree so it feels like there is a huge war going on and the player is a part of it, not the only reason for the missions being there." The game looks amazing in its current form — and even more amazing are DA's plans to make it playable in both hardware and software

Another interesting aspect of *Starlancer* is that it's acting as kind of a prequel to *Freelancer*, the other ambitious 3D space combat game currently being developed by Chris Roberts and due out later next year. *Freelancer* is set many years after *Starlancer*, in which the ragtag remnants of humanity are attempting to piece together the details of their shattered past. So, if *Freelancer* is high on your must-have list for 2000 (and it should be), playing *Starlancer* will certainly be a good way to get grounded in that universe....

—Gary Whitta



Expect *Starlancer* to be pushing a lot of polygons. You'll need a relatively high-end system to get the best out of it, but plans are still to support software-only mode, for anyone still without a 3D card.

Barbarian

Living on the fringes of civilization, the Barbarian has developed superior battle tactics in order to survive. In fact, he believes he can call upon the totemic animal spirits to infuse him with supernormal strengths and abilities.

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DIABLO II

Vengeance Was Only The Beginning

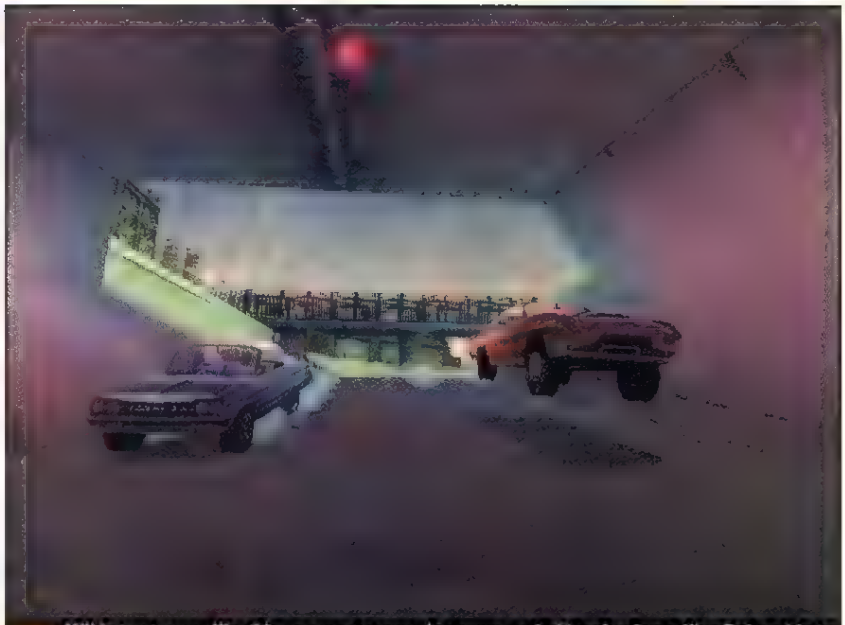
NFS: MotorCity

The newest Need for Speed gets its motor runnin' on the information superhighway

Since its debut in late 1994, Electronic Arts' Need for Speed series has racked up some very serious sales figures — more than 10 million units sold across all platforms — and garnered a legion of hardcore fans who just can't seem to get enough of its stunning line-up of dream cars, top-notch graphics, and bent-for-hell racing action. In an industry where moving into the black is becoming as difficult as keeping up with the latest version of DirectX, the Need for Speed line is the epitome of success.

But as a wise person with a good sense of brevity once noted, nothing succeeds like success. And while EA might be loath to admit it, the very success of the series probably has a lot to do with the fact that not a lot has changed in the game's five iterations on the PC. Sure, there've been new cars, new tracks, improved graphics, support for 3D accelerators, and new racing modes, but when you get down to brass tacks, these are the sorts of features you assume will be part of any new installment in a racing game series. All of the Need for Speed games have been a blast to play, and every new version improves on the visuals, but none of the sequels have featured anything approaching truly revolutionary gameplay features.

Until now, that is. With the upcoming release of *Need for Speed: MotorCity*, EA is making what pundits call a "generational" leap in game design and technology. There's no need to worry, though; the same breakneck racing and luscious graphics that made you fall in love with the series in the first place are still there. But where previous incarnations fell into the "hands off" category somewhat, *MotorCity* is definitely a "hands on" affair. From paint jobs to engine modifications, you'll be able to tweak the autos here to a degree unheard of in any previous game carrying the Need for Speed moniker.



Wild street races like this are sure to appeal to young and old racing fans alike. Being able to challenge other racers online is a key feature of *MotorCity*.

Upgrade your car with name-brand parts, from Holly carburetors to Hurst shifters — you'll even be able to see the upgrades you make to the interior.

One of the big reasons for the change is the new direction EA has taken with the car line-up. Instead of mega-dollar dream cars of the 1990s, *MotorCity* looks back to what many consider the golden years of automotive history. The game will ship with 35 cars spanning five decades, including coupes from the '30s and '40s, classics from the '50s like the '57 Bel Air and the '57 Thunderbird, and a plethora of muscle-car legends from the '60s and '70s Mustangs, Chevelles, GTOs, a classic 'Cuda, a legendary Duster, and many more will be available for your driving pleasure. EA is also promising that within two months of the game's release, there will be 10 extra cars available for download.

The difference between this game and others that featured classic cars, says *MotorCity* product manger Peter Royea, is that, "previous games didn't succeed because there wasn't a broad-appeal concept behind them. We looked back at what is still considered the peak of car culture in America — a time when car buffs worked on their cars to personalize them and make them fast."

That's something you were deprived of for all intents and purposes in earlier Need for Speed games. Even Royea admits that the sorts of cars featured in earlier NFS games weren't suitable for the kind of down-and-dirty work that could turn a junker into a drag-strip champ. "Compare the cars of the '50s and '60s to today's cars, where if you look under the hood there isn't really much in there that you can get your hands around without a lot of certified knowledge and specialized tools,"

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Arcade racing

DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
(800) 245-4525, *www.ea.com*

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 80%

RELEASE DATE: First Quarter, 2000

IN A NUTSHELL: The latest installment in the red-hot Need for Speed series gives gamers the chance to drive some of the most celebrated cars from the 1930s through the 1970s. And because this era was the heyday of hot rodding, expect to be able to customize your car until it's the coolest ride in town. There is also a whole new element being added with online play where you can hook up with other racers.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL? *MotorCity* isn't just the subtitle for the newest NFS game; it's an online community where you can hang out with other speed demons and meet opponents. Because it's a persistent online world, you'll be able to earn cash by putting your money where your mouth is — you can compete on sanctioned circuits, or challenge that greaser down at Roxie's Diner to a little drag race with your pink slips on the line.

www.DailyRadar.com

he says. "We realized cars from this era were very much about bragging rights as much as about racing stats. And that meant we could make a game that wouldn't just be about racing, but would also embrace a sense of community in a number of ways that could mirror the car culture of days gone by."

Royea's referring to a time when autophiles didn't just have a need for speed — they were on a quest to build the fastest *and* flashiest cars in town Says Royea, "*MotorCity* features every conceivable option to personalize cars and modify them depending on how the gamer intends to use their car. If the drag strip is where they'll be spending most of their time, then they won't have to be worrying about all the goodies that will help a car corner better — just improving the straight-line time for running the quarter mile You can track down hundreds of name-brand parts — Hurst shifters, Crane Cams, Holly Carbs — that will affect the performance of your vehicles from engine output to car handling. On top of that, there are tons of visual customization options, from paint jobs to chopped tops. You can even customize your car right down to the fuzzy dice in the window!"

But perhaps the most important reason behind customizing your cars is that *MotorCity* is the first serious step into the world of Internet gaming in the Need for Speed series. EA has been notoriously slow in incorporating Internet play into any of its games — especially sports and racing titles — but that's the primary emphasis of *MotorCity*. This isn't just some cool name tacked onto the next NFS game, but a full-blown online community where players can meet, race in sanctioned events on authorized courses, or head out to the streets for some gritty head-to-head action. And it's not merely a service for matching opponents, either. This is a persistent game world, where you can buy and sell cars, create custom paint jobs to offer to other racers, and almost live out an alter-ego cyberlife in car-oriented hangouts like Roxie's Diner, the MotorCity Gas n' Go, Sal's Drive-in, and Roadkill Cafe. Challenge someone to a race with pink slips on the line, and you might lose your ride - assuming the cops don't catch you in the act, of course.

"Cars used to be about ego and fun, which translates very nicely to a game that centers around a 'place' where you can interact with a community in a number of ways that they would in real life," Royea says. And EA is obviously hoping that gamers will become so immersed in MotorCity that it takes on a life of its own. Royea says that besides customizing your car, you can also pick up MC bucks by playing the market. He claims that "real-life supply-and-demand is factored in so the community of MC will determine prices. If you find a car in MC that you think is a bargain or has a lot of potential, you can pick it up, fix it up if you think it will increase the value, and then post it for sale in the classified section of the MC Gazette."

> **"We looked back at what is still considered the peak of car culture in America — a time when car buffs worked on their cars to personalize them and make them fast."**
>
> PETER ROYEA, PRODUCT MANAGER

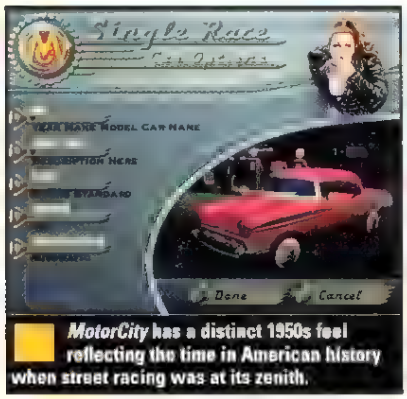
It all *sounds* great — racing in sanctioned events, taking it to the streets for a little off the-cuff racing (yeah, the cops will be watching), and doing some horse trading with your friends to make a few bucks. But this is online racing, and one word comes to mind — *latency*. How does EA plan to deal with this ever looming problem facing dial up users? *MotorCity* producer Jim Edmunds says that the problem will be addressed in two ways. The first is to use "positional" instead of "controller" updates: your computer only sends your speed, position, and heading on each data update, omitting what's going on with your input device. The other is to extrapolate and interpolate where your car will be based on your speed and heading at the *last* update

Hangouts like Roxie's Diner are where you'll meet potential victims, er, I mean opponents, in the online world of *MotorCity*.

It sounds reasonable, but this same song has been sung to the online gaming choir for years, and we still have the same old problems of vanishing vehicles and unexplained mishaps. How well the *MotorCity* Internet code *really* performs won't be known until the game's release in the first quarter of 2000. Then there's the issue of membership EA says that at this time there's no monthly fee planned, but the success of a persistent world like *Ultima Online* that charges a low monthly fee can't have gone unnoticed by the EA brass

That said, even latency problems and a small monthly fee should do little to deter the speed freaks from lining up and embracing the idea of a complete, self-contained community of hot-rodders. When this baby gets up and running, you can count me in.

- *Stephen Poole*



MotorCity has a distinct 1950s feel reflecting the time in American history when street racing was at its zenith.

Drive out to the dragstrip for some head-to-head — and completely legal — racing action. Win the race, and you might even take home a new car.

Aren't you going to ride it? (After all, you built it.)

PC

PlayStation

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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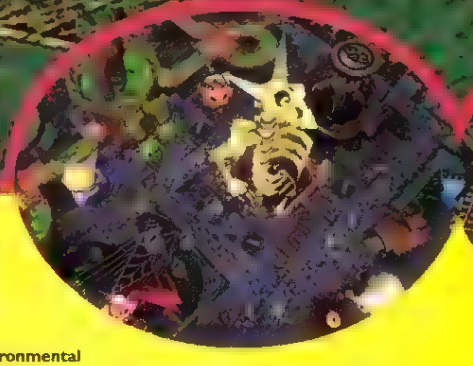

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Ride the rides

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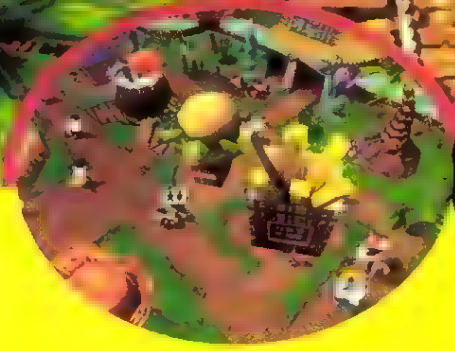
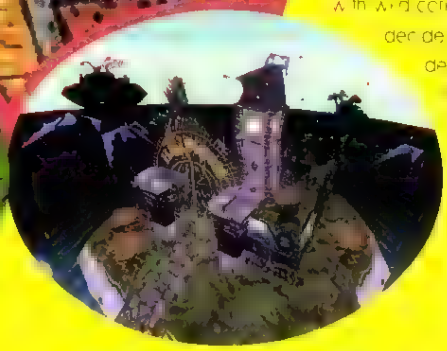


Salt the fries



Share your park online

SIM Theme Park

Urban Chaos

Was Nostradamus right? Find out in Eidos' upcoming action game

It seems that all forms of media are benefiting from the fascination and fear people have about the new millennium. Apocalyptic supernatural thrillers crowd the multiplex, news coverage is dominated by natural disasters pounding the world at an alarming rate, UFO religions are getting serious airtime, and even *Daikatana* is actually set for release soon. All these signs point to impending catastrophe! Fortunately we have a game coming that will let us strike a blow against these evil forces, before they can overwhelm us.

Urban Chaos, from developer Mucky Foot and Eidos Interactive, features a fitting storyline for the dawn of a new millennium. It seems that the Fallen, a rabid cult of bad guys, is out to prove that Nostradamus (the hoary old dude who has kept the *Weekly World News* in headlines for years now) was right about the year 2000. Bad stuff is set to happen: plague, famine, warfare, mass hysteria, dogs and cats living together...you know, that sort of thing.

So, while the populace prepares to celebrate the new era, two heroes will try and stand in the way of the Fallen's dire, and as yet, undisclosed plans. Both will be playable, and appear to be vastly different from one another. D'Arci, a young police officer who is fast, acrobatic, and a hand to hand fighting super sleuth, and ex-cop Roper McIntyre, an older, slower, but more powerful veteran, must fight their way through the mean streets of a fully realized 3D metropolis. "Urban City" is an amalgam of actual streets from real-world San Francisco and Chicago. According to Producer Eric Adams, "The city is comprised of 200 by 200 city blocks with unique districts such as the docks slums, and a ball park. The player will have complete freedom to explore every area of the city from buildings to rooftops," he says. Roper and D'Arci can even ride subways, scale skyscrapers, or commandeer vehicles in the course of their adventures.

> **"The player will have the complete freedom to explore every area of the city from buildings to rooftops."**
> Eric Adams, Producer

In all, the game will feature thirty missions with several multiple branching sub-missions, a host of non-player characters (NPCs) to interact with, and a mix of random and scripted events that may differ each time the player visits, giving the city streets a realistic quality. One time a street may be crowded with Holiday shoppers during the day, and that same street may host a pitched gunfight by night or perhaps a drive-by shooting will occur at either time. The idea behind this variability is to enhance replay value and give the city its own living, breathing character. Non-player characters will appear in different locations each time, and most of the bad guys will, too.

This variability should give *Urban Chaos* an important gameplay edge over the holiday competition, but the game is also set to be a real looker. It features a brand new 3D graphics engine capable of real-time lighting, volumetric fog, wall-hugging shadows, bump mapping, and a host of other 3D accelerator bleeding edge buzzwords. "Graphically, the city comes alive with litter, falling leaves, rain, sewer gas, potholes and even pigeons," says Adams.

Combat has also been extensively modeled. From ballistics to martial arts, it seems that any kind of fight you want to have is possible in *Urban Chaos*. Says Adams, "The user not only fights with weapons, with realistic physics and advanced targeting, but hand to-hand combat includes some of the most painfully accurate moves ever animated." This is important, because the city not only features insane cultists, but also gang warfare has apparently been on the rise in Urban City.

With the development team hitting their marks for their more important than usual shipping date (before the year 2000), *Urban Chaos* seems poised to usher in the next millennium with unprecedented graphics and gameplay value. It isn't often you get to ring in a new millennium by saving the world, right?

— Andrew Bub

You can explore every part of Urban City, from the back alleys to the rooftops. You'll never know what you're walking into.

There will be plenty of combat in *Urban Chaos*, whether you prefer gunplay or a little hand-to-hand combat. You may even get to use your mad martial arts skillz.

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Action

DEVELOPER: Mucky Foot

PUBLISHER: Eidos, (415) 538-0999, www.eidos.com

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 80%

RELEASE DATE: December 1999

www.DailyRadar.com

Warlords Battlecry

Can the Warlords series survive the transition from turn-based to real-time?

Many of the units found in the conventional turn-based Warlords games have been carried forward into *Battlecry*, including well-developed heroes.

With *Warlords Battlecry*, the classic fantasy-combat series is taking a sharp turn away from the turn-based strategy roots that made it a cult hit to traverse the choppy waters of the real-time realm. But Warlords fans should not see this as one of the signs of the coming Apocalypse - a turn-based Warlords game is currently in the works, and the series will continue as long as people keep buying. Think of *Battlecry* as a spin-off, like *The Tortellis* or *After M.A.S.H.* Well, hopefully better than that, but you get the point.

So why take a distinguished, decade-old series with a loyal following and turn it into another RTS game? We put that pressing question to Executive Producer David Chow: "The first reason is that most Warlords fans enjoy the real-time category as well as the turn-based category," he says. "We did research on Warlords players and found an extremely high interest level in both the real-time category and some of the game elements in Warlords being taken into a real-time game, like stacks, quests, and heroes. The second reason is SSG has been designing a Warlords real-time product for over three years. In fact, SSG prototyped *Warlords III* in 1997 in real-time to try out the game system, and it was really fun. They eagerly awaited the chance to do a real-time Warlords product."

Battlecry will encompass elements familiar to both RTS games and the Warlords series. Resource management and troop creation in real time are matched with fantasy quests, long-range development of heroes, and a complex magic system to create a true hybrid of the two approaches. The game is set in the familiar world of Etheria, and traditional *Warlords* units like dragons, minotaurs, and elementals will comprise the unit rosters. Quests and developing characters will give the game a more narrative, persistent-world feel with fewer expendable units. As in the turn-based game, units can stack to receive bonuses from spells and heroes. The world will look similar to *Warlords*, and the wide array of play types, configuration options, and unit choices continues an SSG tradition of completely open and customizable play.

Some of the elements the team is working on for multiplayer sound even more intriguing. Ten variants on multiplayer are currently in the design, including Capture the Flag, King of the Hill, North versus South, and more. Since hero development is such a crucial part of the solo game, it will also be found in the multiplayer game. *Battlecry* multiplayer will enable gamers to have persistent heroes who can be developed over dozens of multiplayer games. In theory, you could create multiple heroes, such as an advanced level Necromancer, Pyromancer, Barbarian, or Ranger. The deep magic system, complete with nine spheres of magic and more than 80 spells, will be a crucial element in both exploiting and play-balancing this system via spells and counter-spells. The inclusion of quests within multiplayer games will also challenge players to better allocate units and resources: do you conquer and expand or pursue a lucrative quest?

One final reason Chow gives for bringing *Warlords* to this crowded field hits closest to the mark. Simply put, SSG feels they can do it better, particularly in terms of artificial intelligence and play balance. "The formula of 'let's define an advanced computer opponent as having twice the resources of the human player and build twice as fast' is not our definition of good AI," Chow says. "Good AI is a game system that treats computer players like human players." As examples, Chow cites not only fairness in how the AI gets and spends resources, but something as fundamental as forcing the AI to actually send out scout units rather than just having it know where everything is. SSG has proven itself a master of dense, realistic AI routines in the past, so few bring better credentials to the effort.

— T. Liam McDonald

> "Good AI is a game system that treats computer players like human players."
>
> DAVID CHOW,
> EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Real-time strategy
DEVELOPER: SSG
PUBLISHER: SSI,
(800) 601-7529, www.ssionline.com
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 70%
RELEASE DATE: First Quarter 2000

With 10 different multiplayer variants and the ability to take your developed heroes from game to game, the online play should get mighty interesting.

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Deep Fighter

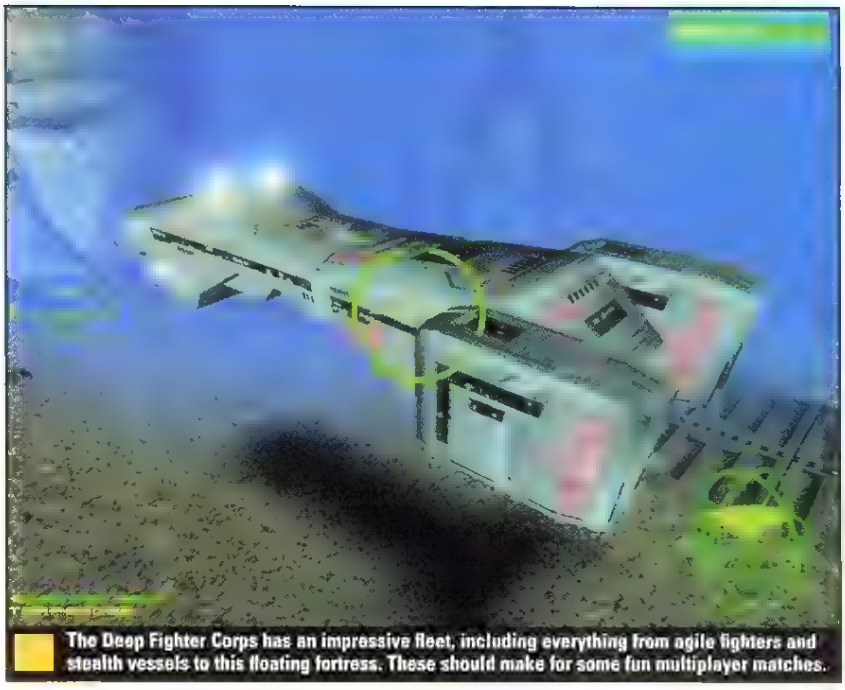
Criterion Studios returns to the murky depths with this futuristic submarine combat game

A couple of years ago, a nifty little game called *Sub Culture* quietly reared its attractive head. It combined occasional sub-surface dog fighting with a trading system right out of *Elite* — except the objects you were hauling were bottle caps, cigarette butts, and other refuse. You see, you played a member of a diminutive underwater race, battling against the polluting "big-people".

Criterion Studios, the developer of that charming title, is revisiting the futuristic, submarine world — this time in full size — with *Deep Fighter*. Though it will be similar in many respects to *Sub Culture*, the new title isn't a sequel. Associate Producer Gruffydd Jenkins explains: "We have tried to retain those elements of uniqueness that made *Sub Culture* special while adding a number of new elements," he says. "For instance, we have extended the game's length, created a much more focused structure, added non-stop action, extended the replay value thanks to an innovative scoring system, implemented AI for a vast array of sea creatures as well as player and non-player vehicles, and so much more."

Deep Fighter is named for the military outfit in which you serve throughout the game. Your underwater civilization is on the brink of extinction, experiencing lava eruptions, earthquakes, landslides and all sorts of wrath-of-God type stuff. To top it off, enemy factions are closing in to finish the deed. It's up to you to save the day, and to do it you'll have to take the helm of several different submarines to embark upon crucial missions geared toward helping your people build a gigantic mothership, the Laviathon, and move to less hostile digs.

The struggle will require more than twelve missions, set in a story-driven campaign. Don't be turned off by the linear nature of the campaign, though. "As you progress through the game," says Jenkins, "the mission structure loosens and gives the player more freedom. For instance, it is very directed at the start, but by the end, it'll almost be about solving puzzles to get through landscapes."

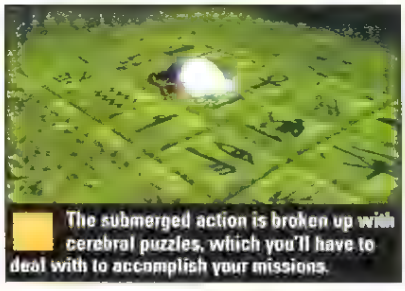


The Deep Fighter Corps has an impressive fleet, including everything from agile fighters and stealth vessels to this floating fortress. These should make for some fun multiplayer matches.

> "The Sophisticated Object Command Interface is an engine that has also allowed us to incorporate a variety of enemies and organic life, each with different behavior patterns, enemies, and prey."
>
> GRUFFYDD JENKINS, ASSOC. PRODUCER

Relieved of having to create a dynamic mission generator, the development team was able to focus a lot of attention on *Deep Fighter*'s AI. Says Jenkins, "*Deep Fighter* uses the Sophisticated Object Command Interface which allows for cooperative gameplay between yourself and other submarines (as with multiplayer gaming). It is an engine that has also allowed us to incorporate a variety of enemies and organic life, each with different behavior patterns, enemies, and prey."

The *Deep Fighter* forces have a plethora of ships at their disposal, each of which has unique capabilities. When your mission calls for direct confrontation, you'll pilot attack vessels such as the Standard Attack Sub, the heavily armed Modified Police Fighter Sub, or the nimble Military Fighter. Missions will have objectives other than battling enemies, though, so the fleet contains other specialized craft like the Worker Sub and a radar shielded Stealth Fighter.



The submerged action is broken up with cerebral puzzles, which you'll have to deal with to accomplish your missions.

These will also come in handy when you're battling it out across a network. *Deep Fighter* will contain some intriguing multiplayer options. Standard deathmatch is a natch, and options such as Resource Deathmatch (in which each player builds a base by collecting resources, defending it, and trying to destroy his opponent's), a checkpoint race called Free Willy, and an underwater football-style game called Rockball.

One of the most amazing aspects of *Sub Culture* was its eye-popping graphics, and *Deep Fighter* will follow suit. According to Jenkins, its advanced engine features, "...full dynamic color lighting which does wild things in water, volumetric fogging so we have massive areas of localized fog and steam, and an advanced shadow system which allows for realistically projected overlapping of soft shadows." Sounds good to us!

Joel Durham Jr

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Action/Sim
DEVELOPER: Criterion Studios
PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft, (800) UBI-SOFT, www.ubisoft.com
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 70%
RELEASE DATE: First Quarter, 2000

Battletech 3025

ONLINE

Get ready to say "so long" to Solaris

There aren't many fan bases more rabid than the one that keeps the Battletech universe expanding. From its infancy as a FASA boardgame through the development of the blockbuster MechWarrior series, Battletech has provided gamers with one of the most rich, detailed gameworlds ever imagined. Its fans can gleefully backtrack through the history of the Inner Sphere's internecine wars and the subsequent alliance against the invading Clans of the Periphery. If ever there was a game universe suited for a massively multiplayer experience, it's Battletech.

Few people outside of the Battletech hardcore are aware that there already is such an experience; *Multiplayer Solaris* on Kesmai's Gamestorm service has quietly been earning the loyalty of thousands of players for a couple of years now. Blending first-person mech combat with an over-arcing command and experience structure, Kesmai's online-only game has already proven the appeal of the Battletech universe to online gamers.

Now ready to take this achievement to the next level, Kesmai is deep in development on *Multiplayer Battletech 3025*, a complete overhaul of its current online game system, and one that may break significant new ground on the burgeoning action-strategy genre. *Battletech 3025* will update the *Solaris* engine and add support for 3D hardware in an effort to create a 3D action element that can rival that of boxed shooters.

But the real advance, says producer Nick Laiacona, is the strategic umbrella that will turn *Battletech 3025* into a broad, persistent simulation of a vast galactic war. "Each battle fought online is going to contribute to a larger overall strategic war," says Laiacona. "Each of the five Inner Sphere factions has 10,000 slots for players, and there are tons of command leaders to detail who's in charge of what."

The game's designers wanted to add a sense of overall strategic purpose to the traditional system of ranking ladders that most multiplayer games are limited to by their small-scale nature. Laiacona says, "We want everyone to be participating in the same huge conflict, as opposed to just jockeying for position on an isolated ladder. It's the next logical step."

Players will begin as rookies in training under veteran players. After graduating to a combat lance, they'll be sent into battle on one of 1,900 different planets (all of them, by the way, consistent with the Battletech game universe's complex starcharts). Each planet is made up of 169 hexes, and the unit commanders will move their units on a strategic hex map of the planet under contention; it's just as in any strategy game, except that in *Battletech 3025*, when hostile units meet in a hex, there will be a 3D battle to be fought between living humans. The outcome of the firefight will determine hex control, and the campaign will unfold this way until planetary control is decided. "It's like a persistent RPG, particularly with command promotion to control of bigger and bigger units," says Laiacona. "You can move up to be an XO, a CO, a regiment commander, all the way up the chain."

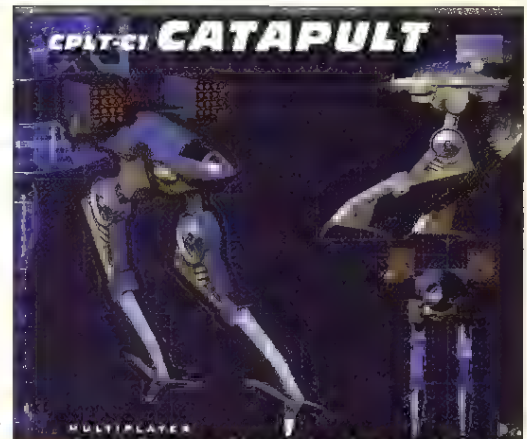
> "We want everyone to be participating in the same huge conflict, as opposed to just jockeying for position..."
>
> NICK LAIACONA, PRODUCER

The challenge for leaders at the strategic level will be even greater. Capitol planets will house regimental headquarters that must be defended. Planetary and interplanetary supply lines have to be maintained, or your ground forces may find themselves short on ammo in the fight. All of this will require shrewd strategic maneuvers, as well as execution in real-time combat by the troops in the trenches.

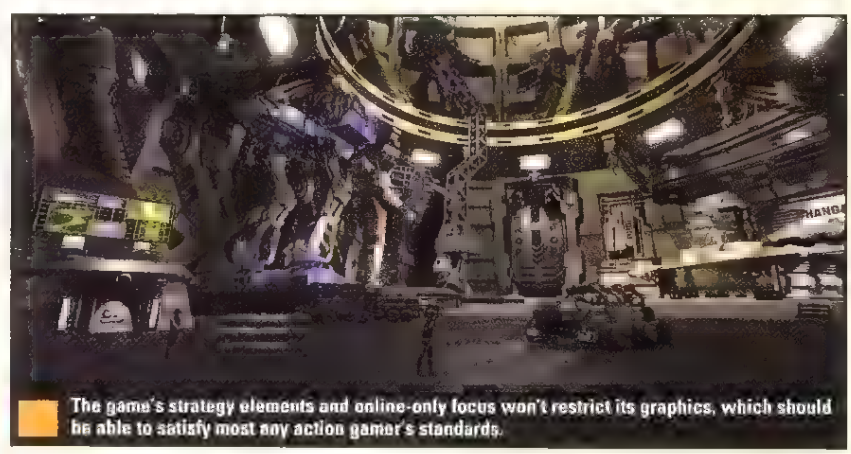
And of course, the dueling planet of Solaris will still be around. Whenever you feel like you need a test of your martial skills, you can duel one-on-one with any and all comers.

The price for all this will be a reasonable $9.99 per month. There are 7,500 players currently running the game through its beta tests, and Kesmai hopes to land 50,000 gamers for the official release. "Our hope is create the kind of persistent universe online that the RPGs provide," says Laiacona, "but then add an organized combat element to it. We want there to be a purpose to everyone's actions." If Kesmai Studios can pull it off, it sounds like every Battletech fanboy's dream come true.

Daniel Morris



Expect the same wide selection of war machines found in Battletech as you outfit your MechWarrior.


The game's strategy elements and online-only focus won't restrict its graphics, which should be able to satisfy most any action gamer's standards.

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Action/Strategy

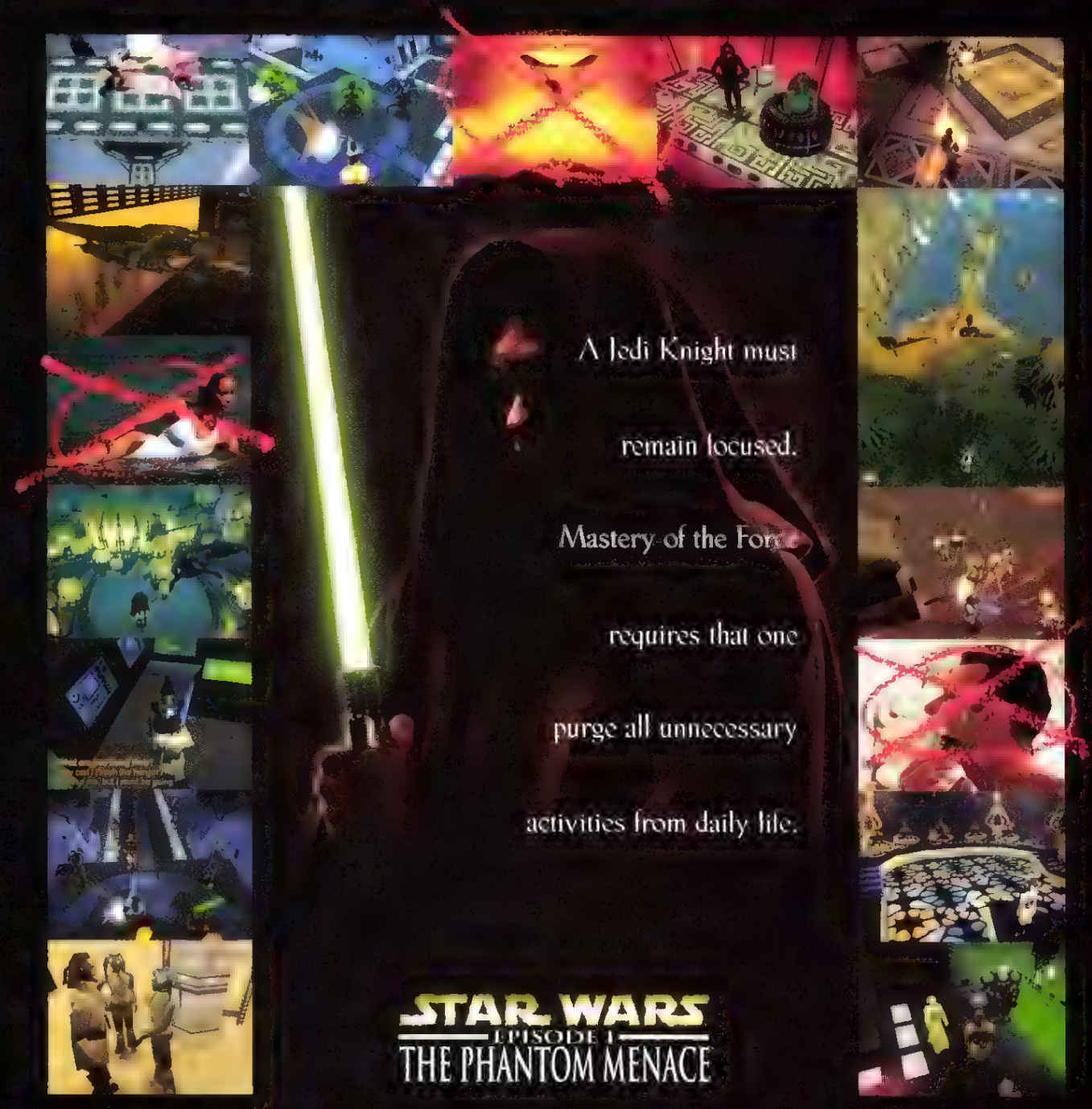
DEVELOPER: Kesmai Studios

PUBLISHER: Kesmai, (800) 819-2051, www.gamesterm.com

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 90%

RELEASE DATE: First Quarter, 2000

www.DailyRadar.com



Prepare to immerse yourself in the epic adventure that is *The Phantom Menace*. As the central character, you will journey to all the stunning locations of Episode I, where you are destined to play a decisive role in every key event. All-consuming? Yes. But then, there's no such thing as a part-time Jedi.

www.lucasarts.com/products/phantommenace
www.starwars.com

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Go to www.pcgamer.com/request Product #445

Realism, Tactics

First stop on any mission is the pre-assault briefing. Here you'll receive the latest updates on the current crisis, configure your team's arsenal, and determine your entry port and tactical approach to the target location.

Systematically search each environment, or take command to breach and clear each location until you find your suspect. As the Element Leader, stealth and dynamic tactics are just a keystroke away when commanding your five-man team.

16 stunning photo-realisitic locations, filled with more than 150 motion captured characters. Each mission is based on real L.A. locations, including the sewer system, the Convention Center, and even the LAX airport control tower.

Experience the challenge of CQB's revolutionary AI. Encounter over 100 goal-oriented characters who react to your every move, ensuring you'll never play any mission the same way twice. From tactical officers to bad guys - they're so smart it's scary.

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and Intensity
"10-David, in the LAPD division, a 211 in progress with shots fired and an officer down at California Security Bank. At least three suspects inside the location with four or more hostages. Suspects armed with automatic weapons and in full body armor."
SWAT 3
CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE
www.sierrastudios.com
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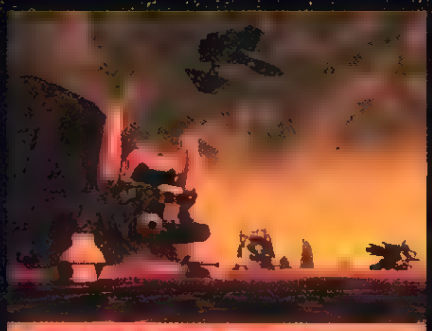

Destroy and Scavenge

Take on morphing enemies with advanced unit tactics like strafing, jumping and laying mines. Instant action and strategy missions get you right into the solo or online battle fray

Battle and Build

Use the terrain to your advantage on five completely 3-D alien planets. Form massive armies, construct bases and factories and deploy your defenses across the solar system.

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CGW and PC Games

PC GAMES A LIST

"...a fantastic gaming experience."
CGW

CG HALL OF FAME

93%
Editors' Choice Award

GAMER'S EDGE CHOICE

Action Game of the Year Runner-Up
Strategy Game of the Year Runner-Up
PC Gamer

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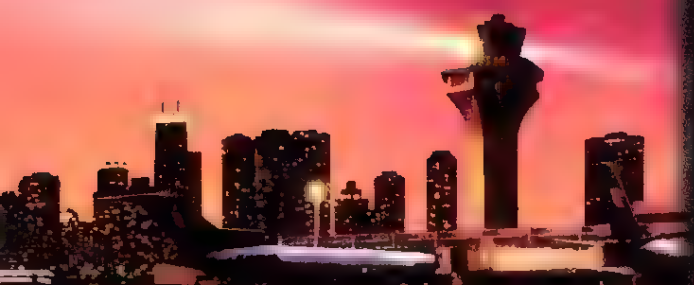

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3dfx

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PC

PRODUCT

The Sierra Shuffle (Again)

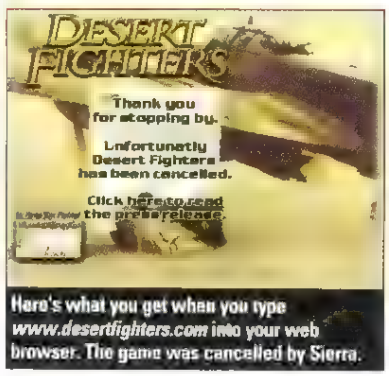
Games cancelled, jobs lost in yet another reorganization

It seems like only yesterday (okay, it was actually seven months ago, but it's still pretty fresh in our minds) that we told you about Sierra's first major reorganization. That fateful day (see our May 1999 issue for all of the painful details) brought the hammer down on several internal development studios including Yosemite Entertainment, Pyrotechnix, Inc., Synergistic, and Books That Work, Inc. It also caused the displacement of some 250 employees (although some did remain with the company in other capacities). Our final comment in that story read, "...let's hope that this restructuring is the start of a new era for the company." It seems to be becoming more like a trend.

Sadly, we once again must inform you of another major reorganization, resulting in lost jobs and cancelled projects. Ironically, this move comes at a time when Sierra is enjoying a financial upswing — its revenues are up 33 percent over a year ago.

Essentially, the reorganization splits Sierra into three business units: Core Games, Casual Entertainment, and Home Productivity. The Core Games unit consists of a host of big-name development studios, including Valve, Impressions Software, Papyrus, and Relic, among others. The Casual Entertainment group will be responsible for all of those Hoyle branded card and board games, the You Don't Know Jack and Austin Powers trivia lines, the 3D Ultra series, and the fishing, hunting, and (ahem) bullfrog titles. Home Productivity will naturally handle the gardening, cooking, home design, etc., products.

It all sounds fairly innocuous so far, right? Even Dave Grenewetzki, president of Sierra seemed upbeat about the move saying, "Over the past year, Sierra has made huge strides in our growth and profitability. These changes will create an even better environment for the development of great titles and, as a result, increase our growth pace."


DESERT FIGHTERS
Thank you for stopping by.
Unfortunatly Desert Fighters has been cancelled.
Click here to read the press release.
Here's what you get when you type *www.desertfighters.com* into your web browser. The game was cancelled by Sierra.

That's what it's all about, then — increasing the growth pace. What Grenewetzki failed to mention in his cheerful quote is that 105 people will be losing their jobs as part of this latest restructuring, including many of those that relocated after the first shake-up. We're guessing that these poor souls can now be considered to have a "negative growth pace."

The job losses are a result of Sierra's decision to halt development on several games. Dynamix, once a powerful force and respected name in gaming, has effectively been eliminated (except for the groups working on the Tribes line of games, who now become part of the Core Games group) with the cancellation of *Desert Fighters* and *Pro Pilot Paradise*. Berkeley Systems' *Orcs: Revenge of the Ancient* has been axed as well. The cancelation that has caused the most outcry from disappointed gamers, though, is *Babylon 5*. In fact, shortly after word spread on the Internet about *Babylon 5*'s demise, a grass roots

CONTINUED ON PAGE 54

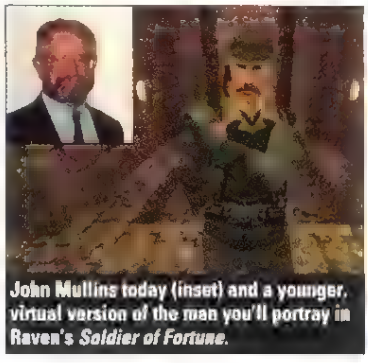
When Sierra announced the cancellation of *Babylon 5*, it caused quite a stir among disappointed fans, resulting in an E-mail campaign to try and save the game. But don't get your hopes up.

www.DailyRadar.com

Interview With A Mercenary

A talk with John Mullins, the real-life soldier of fortune

In Raven Software's upcoming *Soldier of Fortune*, you play a gun-for-hire, tasked with completing objectives and taking out the bad guys. This first person shooter has received a lot of buzz in the press — mostly for its extremely violent content. What you may not have known is that the character you play — and the situations you find yourself in — are based on the life of John Mullins, a real-life soldier of fortune with an unbelievably impressive military background that started in the early 1960s. We were lucky enough to interrupt Mullins' busy schedule to ask him a few questions.



John Mullins today (inset) and a younger, virtual version of the man you'll portray in Raven's *Soldier of Fortune*.

PC GAMER: ***So, how does one decide to become a mercenary?***

MULLINS: Those of my ilk don't particularly like the word mercenary, preferring "contractor" or "consultant." Words have power, and if you go in somewhere claiming to be a mercenary, everyone expects some wild-eyed, gun-carrying, knife-wielding maniac in camouflage, wrapped head to toe in ammunition belts. As to why, retirement from the military and the realization (borne out by several job interviews) that there weren't too many slots in middle management for a person with my particular (some say peculiar) skills. A man's gotta eat.

What's the hairiest spot you've ever found yourself in?

Attempting to assault a dug-in North Vietnamese battalion with a company of Montagnards *(ethnic minorities from the Central Highlands of Vietnam — Ed.)*. We won, I ended up getting the Silver Star, but it isn't something I would try again.

How many bad guys have you killed?

One doesn't keep count of such things. The only score you run up is — did you kill them or did they kill you.

How's the pay?

I've worked for as little as $18K a year (admittedly a long time ago and in a low-risk assignment) and for as much as $250 an hour. It's less than most lawyers will charge, but we get better results. You don't go into this business to get rich.

Are you a gamer? If so, what kind of games do you like to play?

Only recently. I've played *Quake*, *Rainbow Six*, and a couple of others. Now I'm involved in *Age of Empires* and enjoying it immensely.

What is your opinion on videogames and violence as it relates to the recent high school and other shootings?

I'll relate this back to my own childhood. Back then it was *The Wild Ones*, *Blackboard Jungle*, and *Rebel Without a Cause* that were absolutely going to ruin our generation. And of course, the biggest corrupter of youth was that infernal rock and roll music. Most of us turned out pretty okay, though the jury may still be out on me. Guns, violence on TV, movies, videogames, and so forth are excuses — easy to blame. We don't want to admit that we, as parents, have screwed up; that we, as teachers, are afraid to maintain discipline; we, as police and the court system, go easy on juvenile offenders; we, as the media, glamorize such conduct and inspire copy-catting. Besides, I fully believe that some people are born without what, for lack of a better term, we call a soul.

Do you think the gore in* Soldier of Fortune *is too graphic?

It is a mature-rated game, so no one under 18 should be playing it. Frankly, the problem is not with gore, but the idea that someone gets shot.

How true to life are the scenarios a player will experience in the game compared to what you've seen in your work?

It's very true to life if you're talking about the team play aspect. Seldom do you get the chance to go into a situation as a singleton — nor would you want to. It doesn't matter how good you are, sooner or later someone is bound to get in a lucky shot. You die. I knew people who were killed way back in the early 1960s. You know what? They're still dead.

If you were in a bar and someone started something with you, are you confident you could take him out?

Yes, although I've talked myself out of a hell of a lot more fights than I've been in. You get hurt in fights. Even if the hurt is nothing more than getting your knuckles cut on someone's teeth. Ever have an infected bite? Not fun.

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Lemmings Lament

Despite overwhelmingly positive feedback, Psygnosis cancels new Lemmings

If you read our lead news story last month, you know that we were positively ecstatic about the new *Lemmings* game that was in development by Psygnosis. Well, it seems the higher-ups at Sony (the parent company of Psygnosis) didn't share our enthusiasm, as the company has announced that the development of *Lemmings Revolution* will not continue.

The only way we'll get to see a finished version of *Lemmings Revolution* is if another publisher purchases the game from Psygnosis.

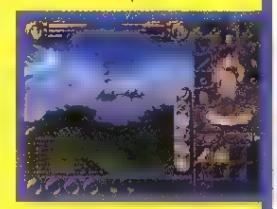
Chris Chown, the lead programmer on the project, informed us that although the fan feedback was incredibly positive, and the demo was downloaded by more than 100,000 people, there were several factors that worked against the completion of the game. Low profit margins on the PC, mediocre sales predictions (compounded by the lower-than-expected numbers turned in by *Drakan*), and the belief that the Lemmings franchise is no longer a sellable property all played a part in the decision.

There's a glimmer of hope that we'll still get to enjoy the antics of those loveable rodents in the near future, as Psygnosis is shopping the game to other publishers. According to Chown, the game is three months away from being finished. Our fingers will remain crossed.

A PC GAMER CONTEST

Design a Level, Acquire Some Cash!

To celebrate the release of *Revenant*, an adventure/roleplaying game, Eidos and *PC Gamer* are teaming up to bring you a level design contest with some serious cash prizes.



The first thing you'll need to do is buy *Revenant*, so you'll have access to the level creation tools included. You then have until December 31, 1999, to come up with the winning design. The *Revenant* team will be judging the entries based on equal parts creativity, fun factor, aesthetics, and challenge. To submit your entry, type *www.eidosinteractive.com/revenant_cont_fr.html* into your web browser. All of the contest rules will be at this site, as well as a way for you to upload your entry.

Here's a look at the prizes you can win:

One Grand Prize: $500 and a copy of the game signed by the development team

Two Second Prizes: $100 gift certificate to the Eidos store and a signed copy of the game

Ten Third Prizes: *Revenant* T-shirt and a copy of the strategy guide.

THE TOP-SELLING GAMES: NOW AND THEN

THE TOP SELLERS TODAY...

NO.	GAME	PUBLISHER	PCG RATING
1.	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
2.	*Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear*	Red Storm	90%
3.	*Rainbow Six Gold Edition*	Red Storm	93%
4.	*NHL 2000*	EA Sports	89%
5.	*StarCraft*	Havas	92%
6.	*Madden NFL 2000*	EA Sports	90%
7.	*RollerCoaster Tycoon*	Hasbro	88%
8.	*Need For Speed III: Hot Pursuit*	Electronic Arts	88%
9.	*Barbie Super Sports*	Mattel Media	N/A
10.	*Monopoly Game*	Hasbro	N/A

...AND THIS TIME FIVE YEARS AGO

NO.	GAME	PUBLISHER	PCG RATING
1.	[illegible]	[illegible]	N/A
2.	*Myst*	The Learning Co.	95%
3.	5 Feet 10 Pack Volume 1	Sirius	N/A
4.	*SimCity Classic*	Maxis	N/A
5.	*TIE Fighter*	LucasArts	98%
6.	80 Shareware Mega Hits	Mattel Media	N/A
7.	*SimCity 2000*	Maxis	95%
8.	Interactive Entertainment	Strategy Plus	N/A
9.	*7th Guest*	Interplay	N/A
10.	*Raptor* (Shareware)	GT Interactive	N/A

THE PCG NEWS TICKER

Martyr, the Nazi-bashing first-person shooter that hit retail limbo when Ubi Soft purchased the rights to the game from Interactive Magic, finally has a new publisher — at least in Europe. HD Interactive has acquired the rights to the game and is trying to work a deal with a U.S. distributor.

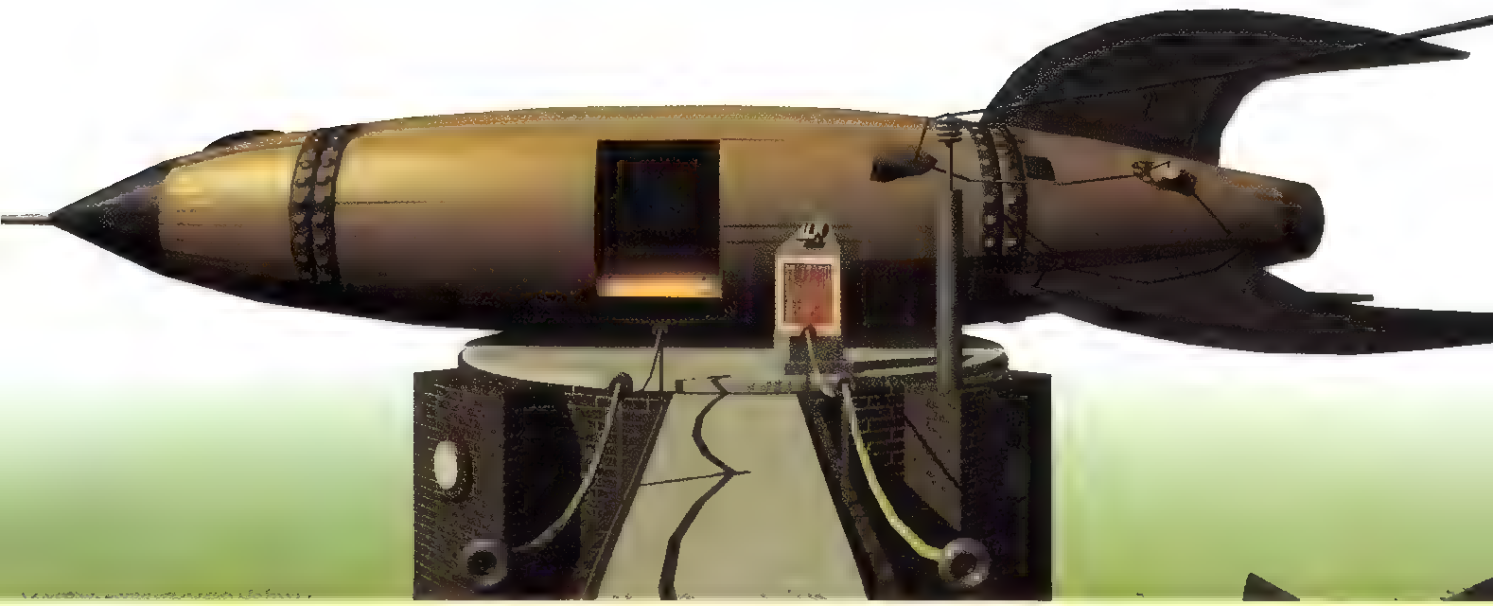
Activision has signed a three-year licensing agreement with Marvel Comics for the right to develop and publish games using the X-Men and Blade franchises. The deal is across all platforms, and also gives Activision the rights to create products based on the upcoming television shows and films.

NovaLogic has announced that its upcoming *Delta Force 2* will take advantage of 3D acceleration to complement its Voxel Space 32 graphics engine. The added power of the hardware will be used to render many of the objects in the game, including buildings, vehicles, trees, and more.

Infogrames was busy this month. After announcing a 37 percent increase in revenues for the previous fiscal year, the company sold developer DID to Rage, themselves a development house. The deal was worth about $9 million. Also, in a deal worth $11 million, the company sold DMA Design to Take Two Interactive.

www.DailyRadar.com

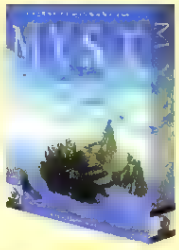
Get Away



Since 1993, over 5 million people have forgotten their everyday worries, finding themselves captivated by Myst's intriguing adventure and stunningly beautiful environments. In doing so, they have made Myst the best-selling computer game of all time.

DigitalGuide: With up to three levels of help it's like having your own guardian angel to keep you from getting stuck.

Now this timeless classic has been revamped with a host of new and improved features. Myst: Masterpiece Edition includes stunning graphics in all new 24-bit color, digitally remastered audio and video, and, most importantly, the addition of our proprietary DigitalGuide™ help technology. The DigitalGuide makes the game playing experience more accessible and less intimidating for players of any skill level.



So if you want to "get away from it all" without actually having to go anywhere, then don't miss out on this, the most advanced version of Myst ever.

Go to www.pcgamer.com/request Product #405

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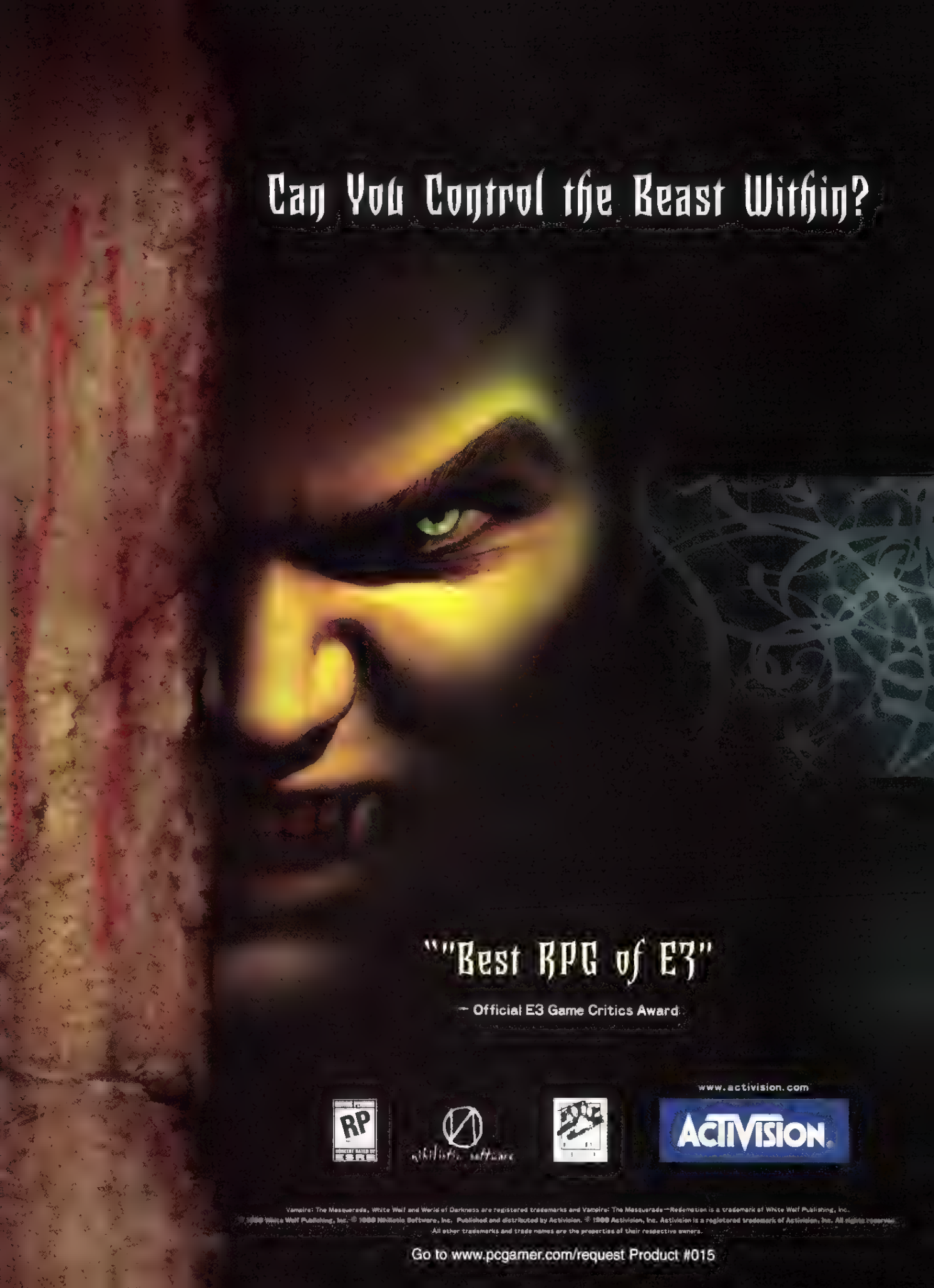
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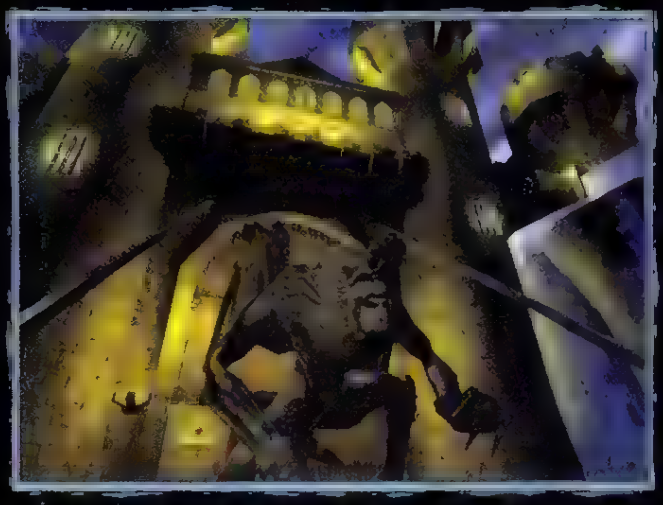
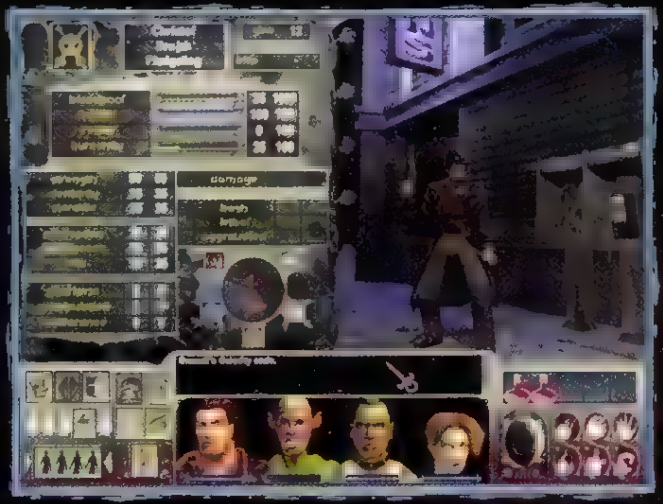


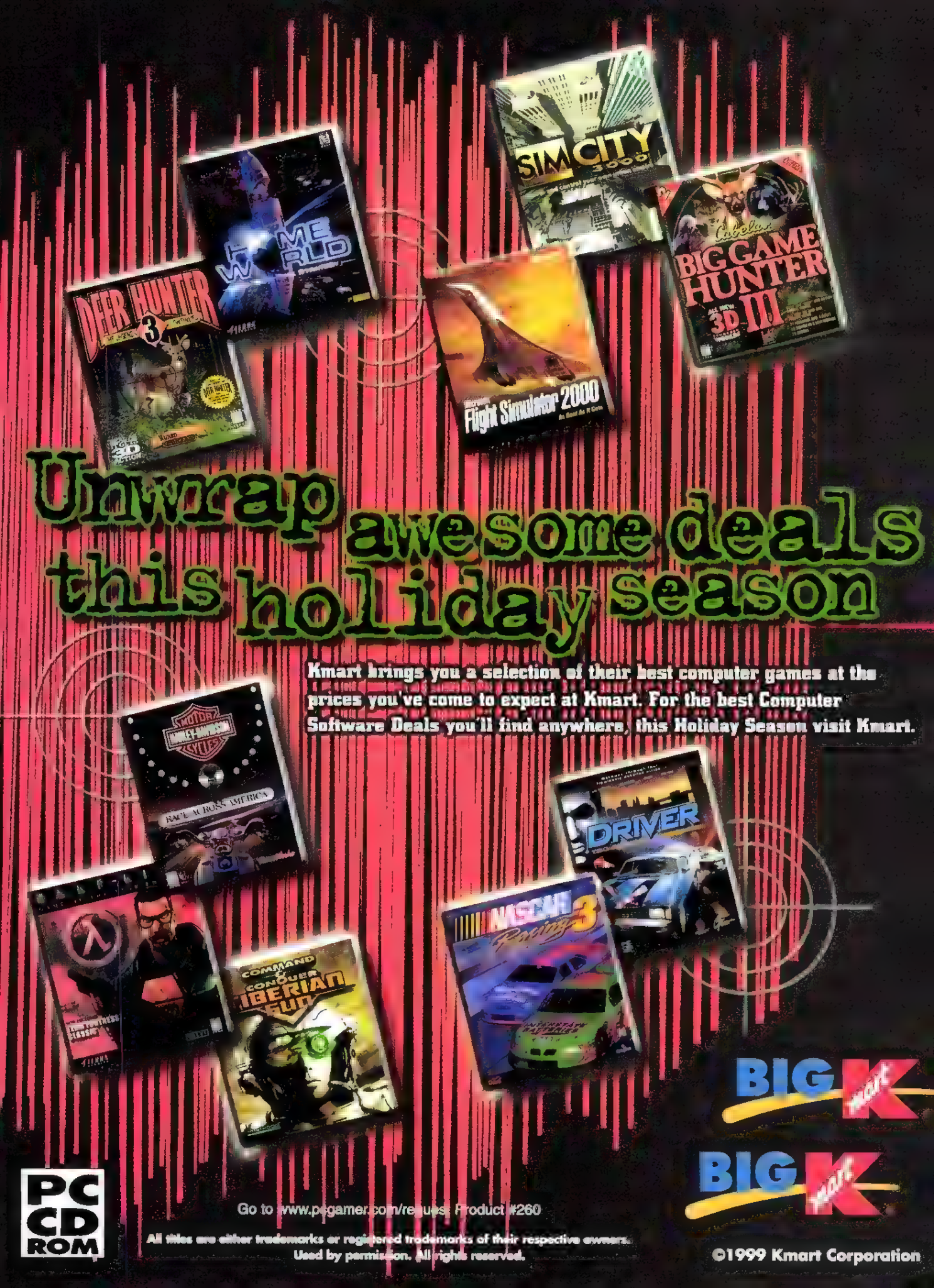
Survive over 800 years — from medieval Prague to a modern-day gothic New York.

VAMPIRE
THE MASQUERADE
REDEMPTION™

Gain experience through quests or slayings to upgrade your abilities or learn dark powers involving combat, stealth and manipulation.



Build your own thrilling online adventure with a unique storytelling system. Choose a clan from the vampiric bloodlines and join in the never-ending war of darkness.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The Winner's Circle

Lucky readers that scored contest prizes

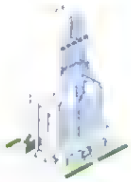
The SimCity 3000 Contest

Grand Prize Winner

The House of the Hardcore Water E Kinel

Coconut Monkey's Gun Shop (Michael Hebert)

This would have been Curly's prize winner but the designer Jacob Kabelis from Canada and is not eligible to win the prize. Sorry Jacob



PC Gamer Plaza
Derek Sowers

The Jane Jensen Contest

These five winners will each receive an autographed copy of Jensen's new book, *Millennium Rising*:

Jessica Ackerman
Alex Spivak
Clark Jay Degn
Neil Moody
Tom Manabe

WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

A monthly tally of our readers' most-anticipated games

All right already...we get the hint! You want *Diablo II*. It's won three months in a row, but don't let that stop you from voting this month. Just send an E-mail to eyewitness@pcgamer.com with "The Waiting is the Hardest Part" as the subject, telling us the *one* game you'd walk across a bed of hot coals to get. Each month we'll list the top 10 vote getters and randomly select one entry to receive a game. All entries must be received by the 30th of each month to be eligible, and the winner will be notified by E-mail with his or her name also printed in the magazine. Additional contest rules on page 54.

DIABLO II

This month, our winner is Jonathan Ko. He's looking forward to...surprise...*Diablo II*. Enjoy your prize, Jonathan.

1. Diablo II
2. Team Fortress 2
3. The Sims
4. Duke Nukem Forever
5. Ultima Ascension
6. Gabriel Knight III
7. Soldier of Fortune
8. WarCraft III
9. Command & Conquer: Renegade
10. Quake III: Arena

PC GAMER RECOMMENDS

Our pick of the best recent releases....

ROGUE SPEAR

Last year's original was among the top 10 most-played games around the *PC Gamer* office (and that's quite a feat, considering how many games pass through our hands), and there's no doubt that this sequel will be challenging for a spot this year, too. No game delivers tactical gameplay quite as well as Red Storm's latest.

FORCE 21

Red Storm served up a double dose of gaming goodness last month with *Rogue Spear* and *Force 21*. While we expected good things from the sequel to *Rainbow Six*, we were pleasantly surprised by *Force 21's* engaging missions and beautifully designed interface, which made playing this real-time strategy game a real treat.

MADDEN NFL 2000

It's been a long wait, but NFL fans now have a PC game to hang their hats on. This version of Madden may not be the best-looking football game (that title belongs to *NFL Fever 2000* from Microsoft), but the engaging gameplay and incredible list of features and customizability options vault big John's game to the top.

>> THE PCG NEWS TICKER >>>>>>>>

On the heels of its purchase of DID from Interplay, Rage has announced an exclusive North American distribution agreement with Interplay for both PC and Dreamcast titles.

Columbia Pictures has optioned the rights to make a movie based on Interplay's Redneck Rampage series of games. Let's hope the film lives up to the high standards the franchise has established.

ThrustMaster, a longtime maker of PC gaming peripherals, has announced that its shareholders recently have approved the sale of its hardware division to Guillemot Corporation for $15 million. The company has also changed its name to CenterSpan Communications Corp. and will focus its attention on Internet communications software.

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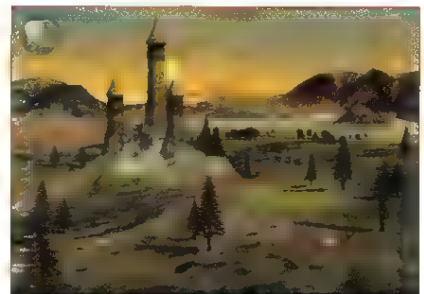
Lionhead Finds Publishing Den

Activision gets rights to at least two new titles from Lionhead Studios

Lionhead Studios, the UK-based development group established by former Bullfrog co-founder Peter Molyneux, has chosen Activision to publish its next two games currently in development. *Black & White*, Molyneux's epic strategy title due out next year, is still on track to be published by Electronic Arts.

Big Blue Box and Intrepid are new teams that are under the Lionhead fold, and will develop the two games that will be part of the Activision deal. Both of these development groups were chosen from among 100 teams that applied for the chance to work with Lionhead. Both have been granted full access to Lionhead's resources, including technology, creative resources, testing, sound, and administration. Peter Molyneux will serve as executive producer, and Mark Webley, the director of Lionhead, will be in charge of project management for both games.



Lionhead's first game, *Black & White*, will be published by Electronic Arts, but Activision will be the publisher for at least the next two games from Peter Molyneux's development studio.

Unfortunately, very little is known about either title in development. In fact, all we can tell you at this time is that the Big Blue Box game goes by the working title of *WishWorld*. We do know that both groups are comprised of industry veterans, many of them former associates of Molyneux while he was at Bullfrog. Brothers Dene and Simon Carter lead Big Blue Box, and Intrepid has Joe Rider, Terry Cattrell, and Matt Chilton at the helm.

Says Molyneux, "Our objective when setting up our new business model was to create an environment where world-class talent could grow and develop the next generation of computer games. It was important for us to partner with a publisher who appreciated this development structure. We consider Activision an ideal partner."

THE PCG RELEASE METER

Your definitive guide to game release dates

As the holiday shopping season comes down upon us, this guide will turn out to be your savior. Who wants to fight the traffic and crowds just to get to the store and find out that that hot new release still hasn't arrived yet? Well, thanks to the reps of release dates, Rich LaPorte, and his Gone Gold work pals (the folks responsible for compiling this list), you'll never waste a fruitless trip to the store again. This list should give you a good idea of when a particular title is due out (subject to the whims of the publisher, of course), but visit *www.gonegold.com* to find out exactly when a game actually hits store shelves. Please send notes of release dates to *laporte@gonegold.com*.

Delta Force 2

Interstate '82

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation

TrickStyle	Acclaim	11/02/99	Sounds about right
Gabriel Knight III	Sierra	11/02/99	Possibly earlier
Hype: The Time Quest	Ubi Soft	11/02/99	In the vicinity
Septerra Core	Interplay	11/02/99	Possibly October
Jane's F/A - 18	EA/Jane's	11/04/99	We believe so
Interstate '82	Activision	11/04/99	Very close
Special Ops 2: Green Berets	Southpeak	11/05/99	About this time
Demolition Racer	Infogrames	11/05/99	Good to go
NASCAR Legends	Sierra	11/09/99	Later than this
X-COM Collectors Edition	MicroProse	11/10/99	A sure thing
Wild Metal Country	Rockstar	11/16/99	Probable
Asheron's Call	Microsoft	11/16/99	End of the month
Age of Wonders	G.O.D.	11/17/99	If not now, when?
Messiah	Interplay	11/17/99	Amen
SWAT 3	Sierra	11/17/99	10-4
Close Combat V	Mindscape	11/18/99	Green light
MiG Alley	Empire	11/20/99	Count on it
Wheel of Time	GT	11/22/99	Finally

Wheel of Time

Sim Theme Park

Soldier of Fortune

Nations: Shadow of Olympus	Interplay	11/23/99	On track
Force Commander	LucasArts	11/24/99	Force says maybe
Ultima Ascension	EA	11/24/99	Go Avatar
Diplomacy	Microprose	11/29/99	Probable
Sim Theme Park	EA	11/30/99	Looks promising
Crusaders of Might and Magic	3DO	11/30/99	Ready your sword
Trivial Pursuit NASCAR	Hasbro	12/02/99	Good to go
South Park: Chef's Love Shack	Acclaim	12/02/99	We'll say yes
Grand Theft Auto 2	Rockstar Games	12/03/99	Might get held up
Totem	Munkki	12/03/99	For sure
Mission Impossible	Infogrames	12/07/99	Yes, or it self-destructs
Mechwarrior 3 Expansion	Hasbro	12/10/99	You bet
South Park Rally	Acclaim	12/14/99	Revved to go
Deikatana	Eidos	12/21/99	Ready or not...
Hidden and Dangerous Add-on	Talonsoft	12/30/99	Most likely
Risk 2	MicroProse	12/30/99	Will be close
Soldier of Fortune	Activision	12/31/99	Possibly later
Vampire	Activision	12/31/99	Yes

www.DailyRadar.com

MiG Alley

Return to Korea in the 1950's as the UN fights its first desperate battle of the Cold War. Experience the dawn of jet combat, when American F86's dueled with North Korean MiG15's in a place that pilots called MiG Alley...

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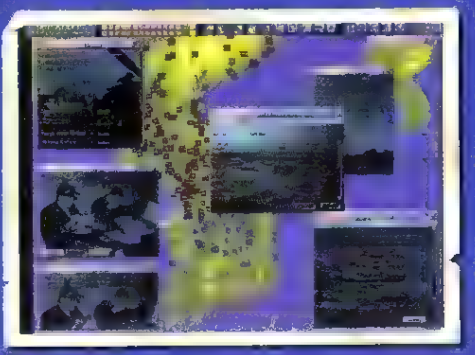

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No Guts No Glory

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Next Month

Ultimate Strategy Guide 2000

Oh yes, indeedly-doodly! Every year, right after you've torn the shiny Holiday wrapping paper from lots of brand new games, *PC Gamer* is on hand to deliver a positively *huge* helping of strategies, hints, tips, and cheats to help you find your way through those games. This year's Ultimate Strategy Guide will be no exception, with comprehensive guides for *Homeworld, Freespace 2, Age of Empires II, Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation*, and many more! Whatever you do, don't miss it.

The Design Lab Another Game God will be on hand to review *PC Gamer* readers' game ideas. One of them could be yours!

Reviews All the latest, including: *Freespace 2, Armored Fist 3, NBA Live 2000, Age of Empires II, Flight Simulator 2000*...and more!

PC Gamer's January 2000 issue will be on sale December 14 at all good book stores and newsstands (and maybe in some doctors' and dentists' offices, too)

The Sierra Shuffle (Again)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 44

E-mail campaign began to try and save the title from extinction. While it's doubtful that Sierra would change its mind and reinstate the game, there's an outside chance that another developer could acquire the license and the in-progress game. Sierra's license with Warner Bros. is nearing completion, and it's a sure bet the company has no interest in renewing it. Sierra would probably be willing to sell the rights to the game, but the cost for both will be quite steep, limiting the chances that a deal can be worked out.

Another title that, while not cancelled, is in serious jeopardy of falling by the wayside is the *Middle Earth Online* project. Based on the J.R.R. Tolkien license (he wrote a few fairly successful books about a bunch of short, hairy-footed people — or so we've heard), this massively multiplayer, online roleplaying game was originally scheduled for a late 2000 release. As a result of the original reorganization, many of the team members were either let go or relocated to the company's home offices in Bellevue, Washington. Now we've found out that all of the remaining team members have been terminated, and the project will begin from scratch with an entirely new development team. We recommend that you don't get your hopes up too high for this one.

There is a silver lining to this latest Sierra dark cloud, however. Codemasters, a UK-based developer and publisher that has recently set up shop here in the states, has arrived cavalry-like to deliver some good news to gamers. Craig Alexander, the general manager of Codemasters' U.S. studio, was also the former GM of Yosemite, the group that was eliminated by Sierra seven months ago. As its first two projects, Codemasters USA will obtain the rights to and continue to maintain *The Realm* (Sierra's persistent online world, up since 1996, that was to act as a testing ground for *Middle Earth Online*), and will also resurrect the *Navy SEALS* game which was suspended earlier in the year.

While Sierra can't be criticized for canceling projects that it felt would result in the company losing money, we do question why it bothered to relocate so many people, only to pull the rug out from under them shortly thereafter. So starts the next chapter in the ongoing story of "The Restructuring of Sierra". Let's hope that we're not rehashing this tired tale come the next July issue.

PC GAMER GIVE-AWAY CONTEST RULES

No purchase is necessary, and only one entry per household, per month, will be counted. Anyone can vote, but only U.S. residents are eligible to win prizes, and the offer is void in FL, NJ, Puerto Rico, and where prohibited by law. Your chances of winning depend on the number of entries we receive.

THE PCG PLAYLIST

What's hot in our office this month

P

GAZ "Presiding over this voluminous tome of gaming goodness has been a rather large tax on my time, but I've still made room for *Homeworld* and *Quake III*. I can't be bothered with *Unreal Tournament* yet — something about it just isn't floating my boat — so my next excursion will be with *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings*."

LISA

DAN "*Team Fortress Classic, Unreal Tournament* demo, and *Quake III Arena test*, of course, but the highlight was beating the editor of *PCXL* in *NHL 2000* by a score of 9-3. *(Bragging about beating one of the* Exaggerator *boys is like being proud of taking a lollipop from a small child — Ed.)*

SMOKE

JEREMY "I've been navigating the stars in *Homeworld*. Not since the days of *X-COM* have I been so engulfed in a game. I'm also looking very forward to the rainy season here in the Bay Area in the hopes that my damned relatives will finally give me a break and stay home once in a while."

GREG

DEAN "*Unreal Tournament* has captured my attention like no other game this year. Every spare second I have at work is well used kicking 'bot ass in this awesome FPS that easily blows *Quake III* away. It's even made me forget all about the disappointing *Tiberian Sun*. *(Good — Ed.)*"

JAY

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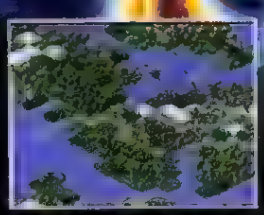
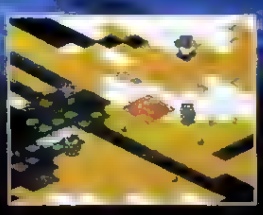
TEST OF TIME





RP

PC CD-ROM

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THE "KILL-ZONE" AS SEEN BY THE 1000 DPI RAZER BOOMSLANG.

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The PC Gamer Design Lab

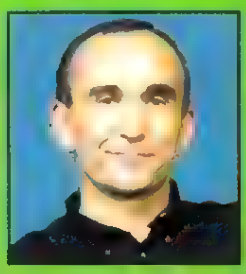
Got a great idea for a game? Want to have it evaluated by a famous designer and maybe even break into the game industry? Start here!

Here at *PC Gamer*, we're often the recipients of game ideas from fledgling designers and wannabe software stars of the future. And we've never really known what to do with them all... until now.

It's so hard to break into the game industry these days, we thought we'd give *PC Gamer* readers a boost with the opportunity to have their very own game designs evaluated by some of the best-known and most respected game creators in the industry. Even better, one lucky winner will get his or her foot in the industry door with a temporary position as a games tester at ION Storm, in which they'll learn the ropes of software creation and get a feel for what it's like to work at a major game developer.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DELANO T. SWANSON

THIS MONTH'S CELEBRITY JUDGE:



Peter Molyneux

Who better to kick us off than the creator of such classics as *Populous*, *Theme Park*, *Dungeon Keeper* and the upcoming *Black and White*? As we hidden a bulging sheaf of readers' design documents from his sweaty palms and he began to sort through them, Molyneux said: "This is hard to do. I think commenting on other people's ideas is extremely difficult because you tend to sound either patronizing or flip bant. But here goes.

Bully

by Marie Guest

The object of *Bully* is to get cash and goods to pay the school bully protection money, so he won't beat the crap out of you. It's basically a 3D adventure game set in high school. You are Matty, a small, spotty kid. You start trapped inside a locker; your first object is to get out. Your first memory is a flashback to the school bully putting you in there; so you know he's coming back.

Lots of elements could be included: Using things found in open lockers and desks to find a way to make cash. When entering classrooms to avoid the bully, you must complete the multiple-choice puzzles to have him pass by. Answering correctly also allows you to browse the desk contents before leaving. You can search coffee machines for loose change, find clothing, and look for places to hide.

Running is only good when it's just the bully on his own; if it's his whole gang, you'll be caught. You can bribe other kids, bet with them and even threaten them, if they're smaller than you. In the gym, you can learn defensive tactics if you have to fight the bully. Entering different classrooms brings different multiple-choice questions in different school subjects. If you have found the dictionary, the calculator, and atlas, these questions are then answered for you.

PETER SAYS: *There just hasn't been a game about schools since the old 8-bit Sinclair classic* Skooldaze. *I think schools as subject material could be amazing. I like the idea of you "surviving" as a school kid, but not in an adventure game setting. Still, a very nice, original idea.*

Theme Supermarket

by Cameron Dobe

It may sound tedious, but listen up. Imagine the anticipation waiting for the next beep from the checkout to confirm another purchase. After setting up the basics, you would stock each aisle with different products. Soon you'll have built your own bakery, a tobacco counter, and a closed-circuit TV network to keep a look-out for ruffians loitering around your store. Either follow them yourself or use a security guard.

If you want to find out your staff's or customer's opinions, take a first-person view and walk around. Employ shelf-stackers for peanuts, expand the aisles, add parking lots, throw a gas station at the exit, and do your bit for the environment by having a recycling center out back. If your supermarket gets too packed, fights will erupt in the aisles. You could do deals with suppliers, or undercut them with your own brand products. You could also do shady deals with the Cheapo Chicken Corporation to supply you with day-old chicken for bargain prices...but if the health department finds out, fines and reputations will be on the line. Soon, though, you will become the king of the supermarket world, and the world will thank you for your troubles.

www.DailyRadar.com

THIS MONTH'S WINNER IS...

ORDINARY DECENT CRIMINAL

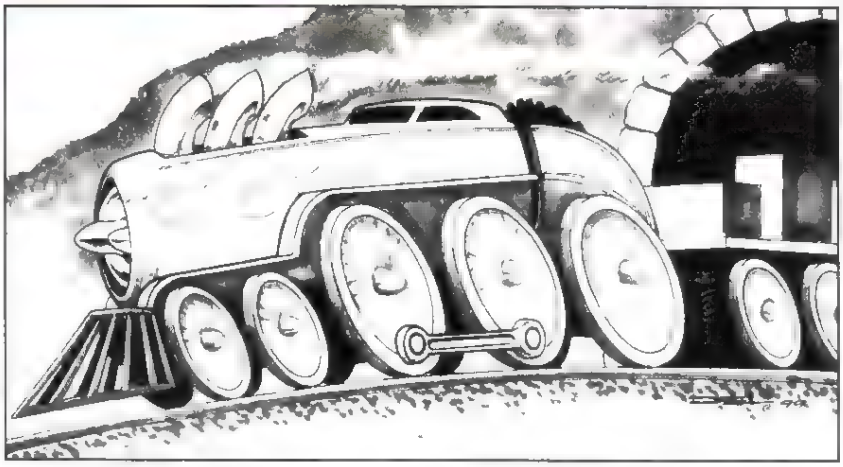
PETER SAYS: *Gosh, the Theme range really could go anywhere. While I was at Bullfrog,* Theme Superstore *was in the cards. The only problem is that supermarkets are not that exciting. Perhaps it would be better to consider* Theme Mall, *to allow more variety and scope.*

Train Simulator

by Michael Da Silva

I've been interested in trains since I was a kid, and still possess a model railway and enjoy constructing it and adding new parts. I live near a major railway, and that's kind of what sparked my interest in this idea. It just seems as though there are so many simulation games on the market these days, I feel that if a company could produce a real train driving and management simulator, it would be very popular.

Train Simulator could include many different challenges and adventures with the option of driving a number of different engines, or even diesel and freight trains. The challenges could include, for example, a trip from London to Swindon on the Intercity or delivering cargo to a specific destination on time, etc.



On the way the train could face traffic lights, station stops, or line changes, and the player would have to deliver their passengers to a given destination within a given time limit. The use of photorealistic shots from inside the train and also of the surrounding areas would make the game an attractive prospect. Animations could be included at different stations, and new challenges could be posted on the Internet.

PETER SAYS: *Believe it or not, there is a train simulator that was a hit arcade game in Japan. You had to drive a train at realistic speeds from station to station. It sounded kind of dull to me. Doing a simulation of a model railway would be hard to do because you wouldn't want to tread on the toes of* Railroad Tycoon *and* Railroad Tycoon II. *However, it could be an interesting simulation, especially if you included mass ive train disasters (to be avoided, of course) — I destroyed every train I had as a kid!* PCG

HOW TO ENTER

Describe your game idea in no more than 200 words, along the lines of the entries featured on these pages. Try not to get bogged down in specific details — your space is limited, and we're just looking for a general overview of the concept and central design. The judges will be looking for originality, the potential for a playable game and that all-elusive "coolness" factor. You may provide art, either computer generated or sketches/drawings to help flesh out your ideas for us (and illustrate these pages!).

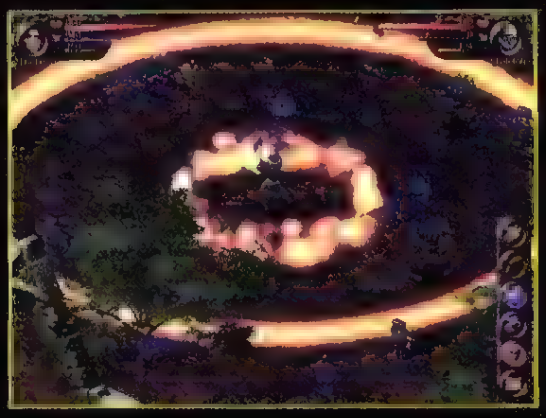
We'd prefer to receive entries via E-mail, so we've set up a special address for this contest: *design@pcgamer.com*. Send your designs along with any attached artwork. If you'd prefer to use snail-mail, the address is PC GAMER DESIGN CONTEST, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005. We cannot return entries, so please do not send original artwork (unless you don't want it back). Your entries will be edited for clarity and/or length.

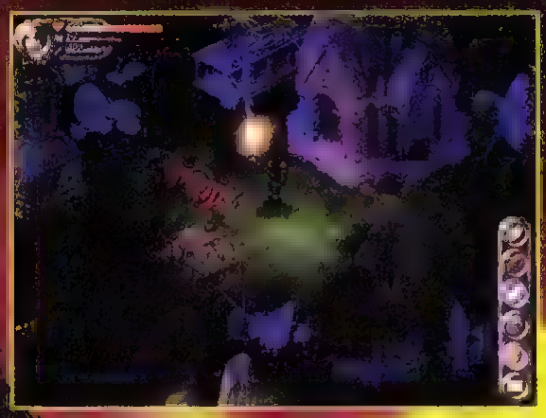
HOW TO WIN THAT JOB AT ION STORM

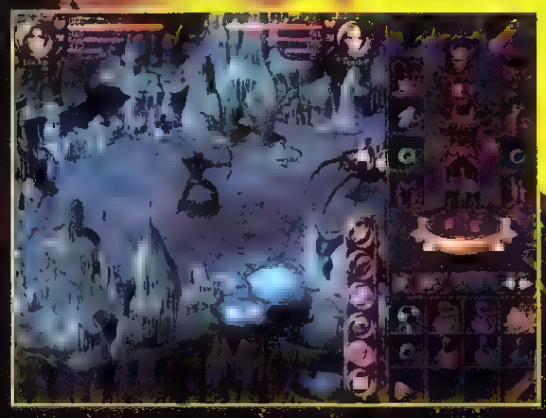
Okay, here's how it works. After this month's "dry run", we'll be running this feature every month for six months. Each month, a different renowned game designer will be on hand to evaluate the best of the game design ideas we receive, and select a winner. At the end of the six months, the winners will be re-evaluated by all the judges and an overall winner will be chosen. That lucky winner will get to spend a week at ION Storm's offices, testing the company's latest games in development. Travel to and from Dallas and hotel accommodations there will be picked up by ION Storm, but the rest is up to you. So, what are you waiting for? Get designing!

LEGAL STUFF — READ IT!

By submitting your game design idea to *PC Gamer*, you acknowledge that your design will become public domain — which basically means anyone can read it, take inspiration from it and use it for their own purposes. You also acknowledge that neither *PC Gamer* nor any of the companies affiliated with this contest has or will have any liability for the use of ideas submitted and/or published.







You are Locke D'Averam, a once proud warrior-prince executed for failing to perform a ritual sacrifice. 10,000 years later, you've been resurrected from the dead by a prominent warlord to rescue his kidnapped daughter.

You are now part of a very special breed of warrior. You are a revenant. In order to regain full strength, you'll need to practice the problem-solving ability necessary to unlock forgotten skills.

And though there may be the whole island of Ahkuilon to explore, and more than 40 monsters to destroy, there's only one Locke D'Averam. And however you choose to live as Locke, we think you'll agree: Life is better the second time around.

- Immerse yourself in a gripping storyline involving the future of the entire world of Ur
- Enjoy explosive spell casting effects unparalleled in any other CRPG game
- Extensive NPC interaction enables you to discover who you once were
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- Choose from 4 character classes in multi-play mode

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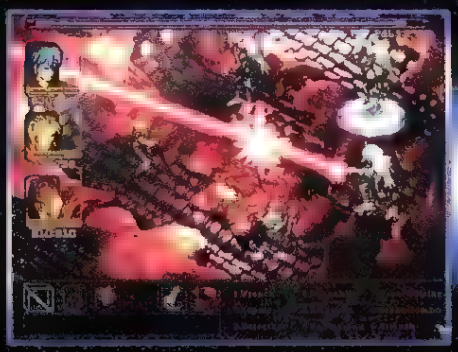

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DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

EXCLUSIVE

BLEW US AWAY WHEN HE ENTERED THE 3D ARENA IN '96, BUT HAS KEPT US WAITING FOR A SEQUEL FOR WHAT SEEMS LIKE EVER SINCE. NOW THE WAIT IS ALMOST OVER. *PC GAMER* CONVINCED 3D REALMS TO LIFT THE YEAR-LONG MEDIA BLACKOUT IMPOSED AFTER DUKE NUKEM FOREVER SWITCHED TO THE UNREAL ENGINE, AND NOW PUBLISHES

FIRST INFORMATION AND SCREENSHOTS OF THE MOST ANTICIPATED ACTION GAME EVER. ENJOY...

BY COLIN WILLIAMSON

In this amazing action screenshot, it looks like this Earth Defense Force soldier was a victim of an alien tentacle attack. He'd be better off cashing in his chips – and what better place to do so than right here, on the Las Vegas strip? Note the authentic detail on the casinos in the background.

IN 1996, THE PC GAMING MARKET FOUND ITSELF UNEXPECTEDLY ENCHANTED BY

A FOUL-MOUTHED, ASS-KICKING ACTION GAME STAR,

UNSURPASSED IN TERMS OF PISSED-OFF DEMEANOR, POLITICAL INCORRECTNESS AND FLAT-OUT MACHISMO. AND HE COULD DRINK FROM TOILETS TO GAIN HEALTH.

THAT MAN WAS DUKE NUKEM,

MAKING HIS 3D DEBUT IN A FANTASTIC FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER THAT REDEFINED INTERACTIVITY AND SUBSEQUENTLY RAISED THE BAR FOR THE ENTIRE GENRE

While the developers at 3D Realms followed up *Duke Nukem 3D*'s success with the *Plutonium Pak* and the lackluster Ninja-shooter *Shadow Warrior*, the gaming crowd was ready for a true-blue sequel to rip onto the scene.

Shockwaves were sent through the industry when 3D Realms announced that that sequel, *Duke Nukem Forever*, would be using the *Quake II* engine, as opposed to the company's own, in-development *Prey* engine. After all, *Duke* had gone head-to-head with *Quake* in 1996, and had emerged victorious, at least as far as single player gameplay was concerned. We ran a cover story on *Duke Nukem Forever* back in November 1997, and the game seemed to be progressing nicely with the shift from its archaic Build engine roots to "true" 3D. The back room demo at the 1998 E3 expo impressed those lucky enough to see it, and featured Duke battling aliens from the back of a semi-truck driving down an exploding Los Angeles freeway.

A few months later, shockwaves went through the industry *again*, as 3D Realms issued the statement that the *Quake II* engine had been scrapped in favor of the newest, most powerful kid on the block — the *Unreal* engine. And with that, *Duke Nukem Forever* disappeared entirely from the media's radar, with nary a screenshot or a development update to be found. Now, a full year later, 3D Realms is finally taking the wraps off its magnum opus for all to see and oh, was it worth the wait.

DEVELOPMENT SECRECY

Why the year-long media blackout? 3D Realms President George Broussard puts it simply: less hype, more game. "We found ourselves falling into the old trap of hyping a game too far in advance," he says. "Today, games get hyped from their announcement. Then there's a steady stream of screenshots until it's released, which may be up to two years away. How can any fan be expected to follow a game that long and maintain interest?" The solution for 3D Realms was to announce the game, then slap on the blinders, developing quietly until the wraps could come off, six months from release.

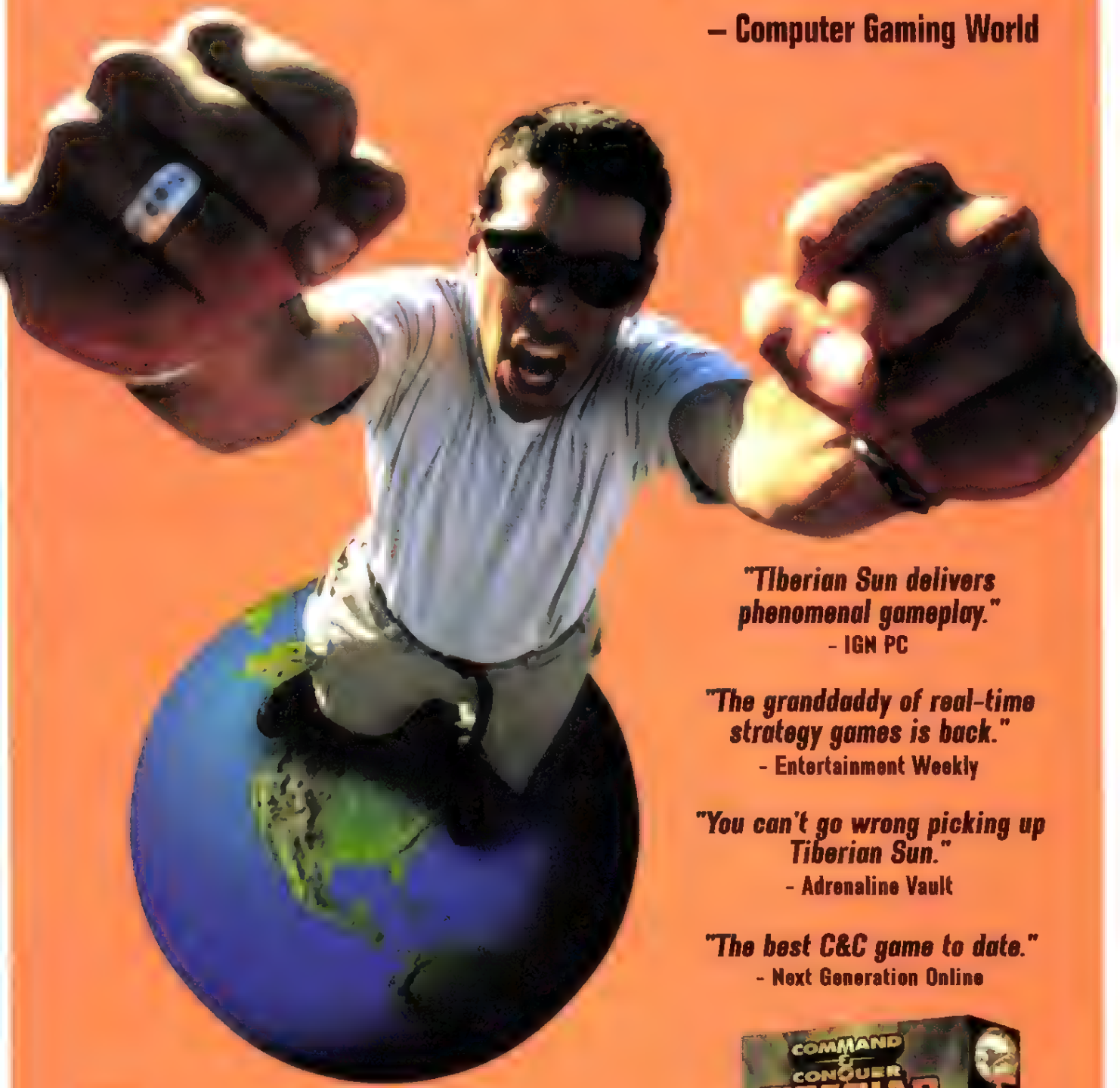
Another issue with Broussard is how games can be "spoiled" by countless barrages of screenshots. He believes if fans have seen all of an upcoming game's guns, creatures, and environments before the game's even been released, the element of surprise isn't there anymore. "What's the point of even playing the game?" he asks. "Just think about how many movies that have been ruined for you by showing too much in the previews. Ignore your publisher's marketing department when they demand that you release premature shots. These people are for the most part clueless, and

Continued on page 72

Come get some! Be they human or alien, you just know Duke is going to plug anybody who stands in his way as he fights to rid Las Vegas of Doctor Proton's evil alien hordes.

"THE CHAMPION IS BACK"

– Computer Gaming World



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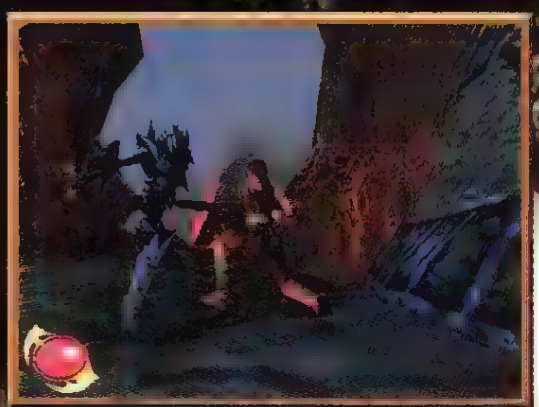

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Continued from page 68

just trying to justify their jobs."

So mum is the word on the majority of *Duke Nukem Forever*. At least 3D Realms let a little bit of the game's plot slip out: after the hair-raising climax of *Duke Nukem 3D*, we assumed that our hero would take some time off — maybe tie the knot with a supermodel, or serve as a guest host on *When Animals Attack*. But there's no rest for the weary, and Doctor Proton — the mad scientist from the original, 2D side-scrolling *Duke Nukem* games — has wreaked havoc on the Las Vegas area with a slew of rank-smelling mutants and various creepy things. Though the *Duke* games have never seemed to have had much of a plot (not that there's anything *wrong* with that), 3D Realms recently contracted a Hollywood scriptwriter to touch up the story for this latest installment. The goal is to make *Duke Forever* play, feel, and flow like an action movie that will keep players interested and driven to see what happens next.

RE-INVENTING DUKE

Judging by the screenshots, *Duke Forever* is certainly *looking* like an action thriller, thanks to the licensing of Epic Games' massively powerful *Unreal* engine. For a game that was released over a year ago, *Unreal* still graphically holds its own against anything else out there — and the *Duke Forever* boys are ready to take it to the next level. "Both engines are great, and have their own advantages and disadvantages," says Broussard. "*Unreal* let us do larger outside areas and had lots more features than *Quake II* did, so we felt that switching was right for us."

The switch wasn't an easy one, however. "We started over," says Broussard. "The maps couldn't be converted easily but that was okay, because they were mostly test maps. *Unreal* lets us design things differently. New maps were up and running in a month, and things were on track again. Textures were re-done in higher resolution, but we had all the art in higher resolutions in PhotoShop, so didn't lose much time. Where we *did* lose time was in the code we did for the *Quake II* stuff and in extending *Unreal*'s capabilities."

Naturally, discussion of any first-person shooter wouldn't be complete without the mention of Valve's massively influential *Half-Life*. "*Half-Life* was an interesting beast," says Broussard. "I played it twice — and loved it. The second time through, we wrote down every plot point and scripted event — guys getting pulled into vents, things falling from ceilings, people thrown through walls. Essentially, in *Half-Life* you walked around and they had a scripted event wherever there was 'dead' space to keep up the pace. You didn't actually 'do' much more than shoot bad guys and watch scripted events, but it was all brilliantly executed and polished."

> **"Don't expect Duke to talk about his feelings, or waste time talking where action is needed. The man is still all about kicking ass."**
>
> GEORGE BROUSSARD
> PRESIDENT, 3D REALMS

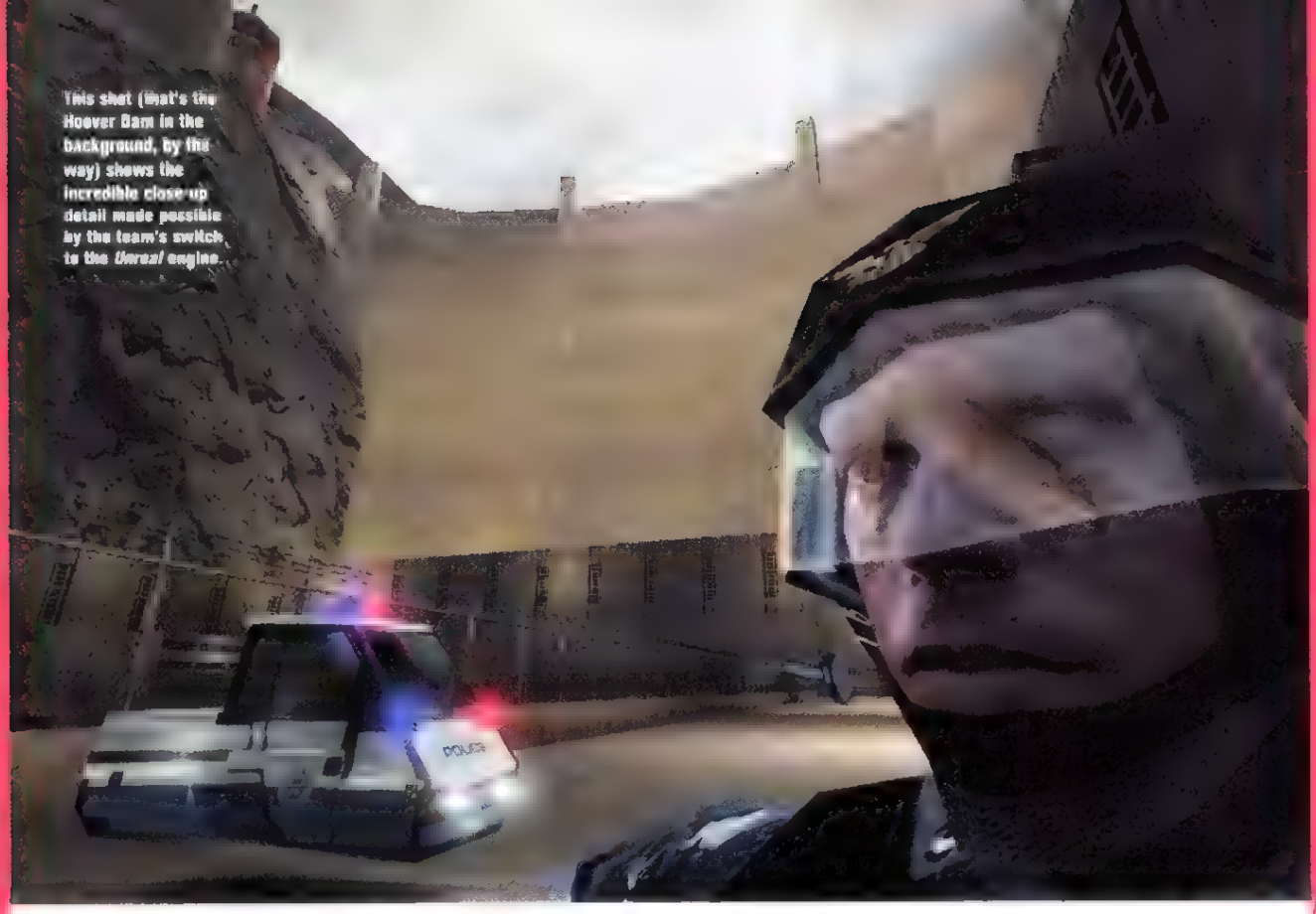
So just what sets *Duke Forever* apart from Valve's baby? Of course, the big appeal is that it's *Duke* to begin with. "You aren't another faceless hero, or one without a voice," says Broussard. "*Duke Nukem Forever* will be incredibly interactive, and there will be endless things to fiddle with and manipulate. All of the story and plot will take place in engine, and be relayed to you by the game's non-player characters." Though the game's supporting cast hasn't been revealed, get ready to meet a busty new female equivalent to Duke named BombShell — could this be a possible ass-kicking love interest for our hero? We shall see.

And of course, expect to hear plenty of wisecracks and "Duke-isms" from the man himself. The 3D Realms team counted about a hundred Duke-isms in *Duke Nukem 3D*, and are aiming to include several times that in *Duke Forever*. All the famous one-liners will be back — and we'll expect more of them to be ripped out of Bruce Campbell movies, too. Since the storyline is a bit more involved than the first game, you can expect extended con-

Groovy! 3D Realms once again pays homage to the Evil Dead movies with this handy plug-on chainsaw attachment.

BEFORE AND AFTER

WHAT A DIFFERENCE *UNREAL* MAKES



This shot (that's the Hoover Dam in the background, by the way) shows the incredible close-up detail made possible by the team's switch to the *Unreal* engine.

versations between the king of carnage and various characters. "But don't expect Duke to talk about his feelings, or waste time talking where action is needed," says Broussard. "The man is still all about kicking ass."

UNREAL PLUS – THE NEW DUKE ENGINE

The rocket scientists at 3D Realms have been busy tweaking the *Unreal* engine to their own twisted specifications, touching up any area of the technology that needed work. The biggest addition so far has been a full-fledged skeletal animation system, like the one used in *Half Life*, but loaded with more features for maximum realism. "We can easily blend any number of animations together in real time," says Broussard. This means that characters will track your movements with not only their heads, but their eyes as well. Eyes blink and speech is lip-synched.

It looks better than anything we've seen on the PC so far, and comparisons can be easily drawn to the Sega's graphically lush Dreamcast epic *Shen Mue*. Parts of models are also swappable, and different "pieces" like helmets, armor, and eyeglasses can be added to characters at will, resulting in a huge variety of random-looking enemies.

Since the game's characters have been modeled with outrageously high polygon counts, 3D Realms added in Sven Tech's *MRG* level-of-detail system to keep things manageable for today's PCs. The further away a character is from the player, the less detailed it is, allowing higher frame rates. Likewise, when you get up close to a character's face, you'll be able to see every bit of detail right down to their perfectly modeled nostrils. It's quite a sight. Motion capture is also being utilized for eerily lifelike animation, and Broussard is enthusiastic about the results. "Motion capture totally destroys hand-animated stuff," he says. "The end results are frighteningly realistic."

And, of course, it wouldn't be a *Duke* game without liberal amounts of blood and ultra-violence. If you're the kind of gamer who prefers titles with bunnies and kitties, Broussard insists that this is *not* your game. "We aren't setting out to try and shock anyone, but we *are* making a very realistic game," he says. "*Duke Nukem Forever* may be the *Saving Private Ryan* of PC games. The content will contain racy and mature subject matter, but nothing *too* over-the-top. We aren't looking to make an R-rated game here... we'll leave that to the fans after release, but we do know what people expect." We're guessing it'll be comparable to Raven Software's already controversial *Soldier of Fortune*, and thanks to the skeletal animation, limbs can be easily blown off characters, from the hand all the way down to the arm.

One of *Duke Nukem 3D*'s tastiest offerings was the Build engine's level editor, craftily hidden away on the CD. Thousands of levels have since hit the Internet, and 3D Realms intends to continue to support the user community, as user-created content greatly expands any game's lifetime. *DukeEd*, a slightly modified version of *UnrealEd*, will ship with the game upon release, along with any other tools and plug-ins developed for the game. "*UnrealEd* was mainly modified to include our increased flexibility with actors and movers," says Broussard. "We also added little features here and there that the map designers requested along the way."

Dr. Proton's mad minions have been genetically enhanced to vomit out metal spikes, as shown in this development sketch. And watch out for the hypodermic needles on that guy's legs – ouch!

MULTIPLAYER

While the original *Quake* featured traditional deathmatching with its generic shotguns and plasma

weapons, its rival *Duke Nukem 3D* was over-the-top with its shrink rays, pipebombs, and various wacky methods of human evisceration This will also be par for the course with the sequel, and Broussard states that a variety of multiplayer modes will be looked at. "We will have straight deathmatch, which builds upon *Duke 3D*'s formula," he says. "We think most people are tiring of straight deathmatch, mainly because the level locations have all been nondescript space stations or fantasy settings, and the weapon variety hasn't changed much We'll offer realistic places to fight in like strip clubs and casinos, and offer fun weapons, so it's not just a rocket launcher fight." And *Team Fortress Classic*'s *The Hunted* level, where a group of players attempt to escort a defenseless civilian through a battlefield rife with enemy snipers, went over gangbusters with the team at 3D Realms. "We'll try to include a couple of other game modes for variety, or some form of team-based play, time permitting," says Broussard Something like *The Hunted* would be fairly easy to do "

Though the performance of *Unreal*'s original network code was less than sparkling, *Unreal Tournament* brought it out of the hole with its outstanding performance *Duke Forever* will feature the same network code as *Unreal Tournament*, resulting in liquid-smooth Internet play. "After seeing the *Unreal Tournament* demo, I don't think you can call the *Quake* engine more robust anymore," says Broussard. "The network play is on par with anything else out there We

"We aren't setting out to try and shock anyone, but we *are* making a very realistic game. *Duke Nukem Forever* may be the *Saving Private Ryan* of PC games. The content will contain racy and mature subject matter, but nothing *too* over-the-top. We aren't looking to make an R-rated game here – we'll leave that to the fans after release."

GEORGE BROUSSARD PRESIDENT 3D REALMS

haven't really touched *Unreal*'s net code and I'm not sure we will — it's just so solid "

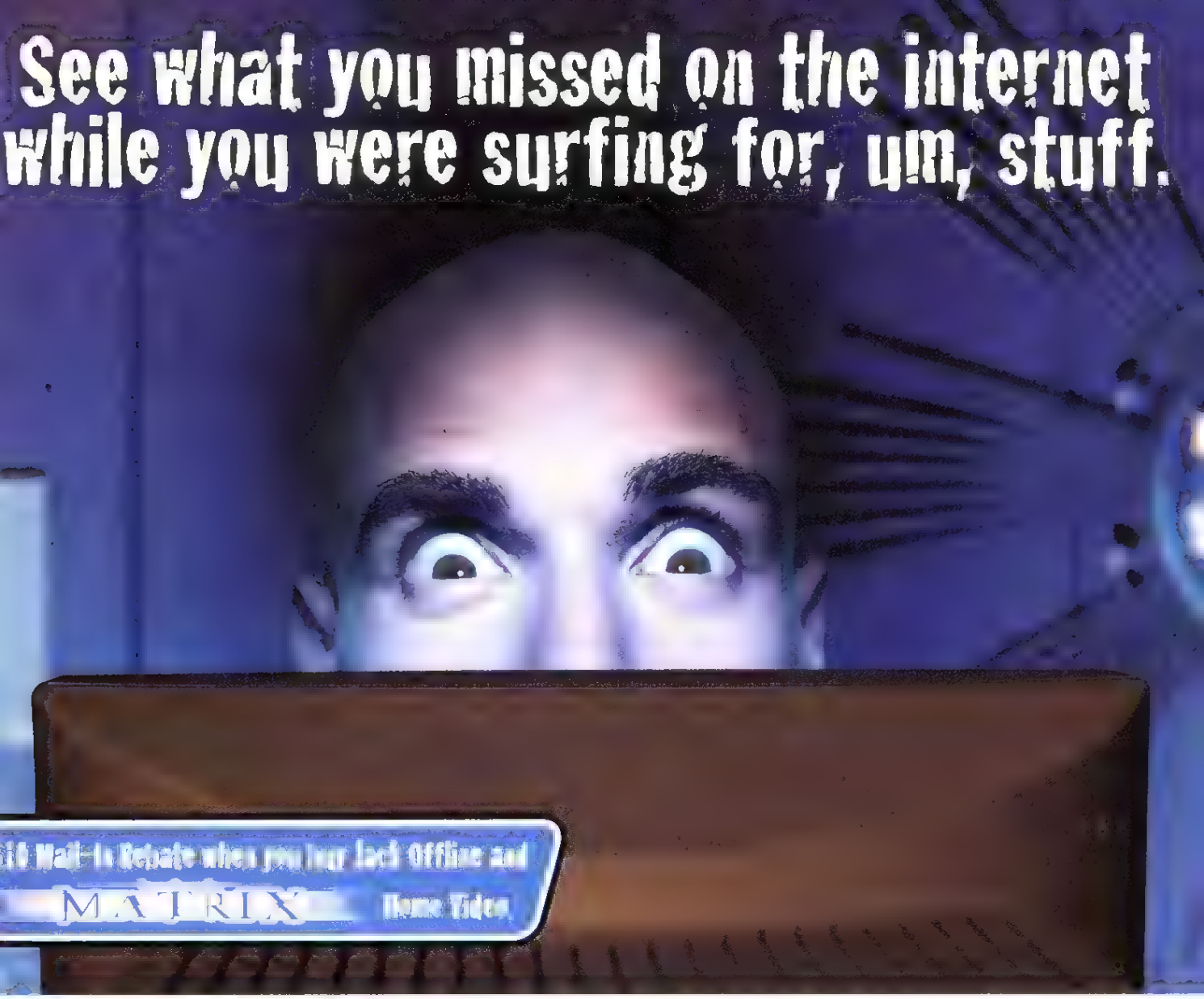
One of the most dramatic moments in the original *Duke Nukem Forever* demo was the speedboat level, in which Duke was blasting bad guys on jet skis, while a C-130 aircraft flying overhead kept dropping reinforcements The implementation of drivable vehicles is currently up in the air, but the *Duke Forever* team desperately wants to see it happen. "We've been working on an outdoor terrain engine for

Duke Forever, and it's fully functional at the moment," reports Broussard "After the patch to the new *Unreal* code, we'll integrate it. If things go right, then this is where you'd find the drivable vehicles. It's more of a time issue than a technical one, but we all drool at the fact that we could have two distinct engines and styles of gameplay Keep your fingers crossed."

A lot of *Duke 3D*'s success came from word of mouth, along with the shareware. 3D Realms expects to release a demo version within two to three weeks of the retail version's release "Any further outside that window, and people tend to lose interest, and doing a demo becomes pointless," says Broussard

So what's the tentative release date for *Duke Forever*? When it's done, of course. "In the end, your game is good or it isn't," says Broussard "All the hype in the world won't sell a crappy game, and if your game is great, you don't need any hype at all." We'll agree with that — but if the final game looks and plays as well as the screenshots seem to indicate, the resulting hype won't be anything to be ashamed of **PCG**

See what you missed on the internet while you were surfing for, um, stuff.



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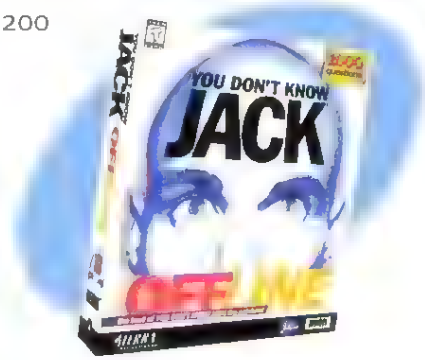

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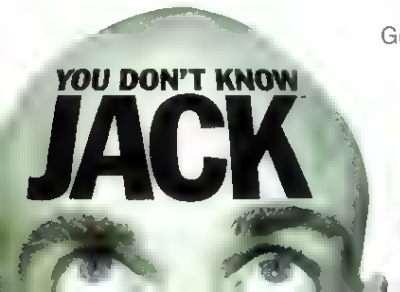

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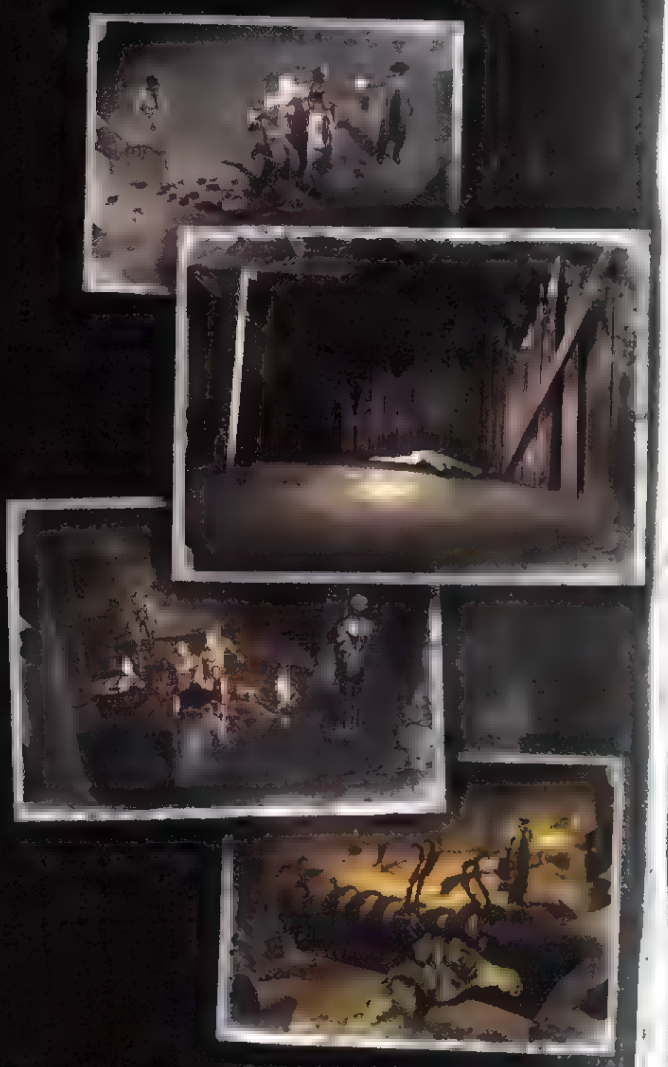

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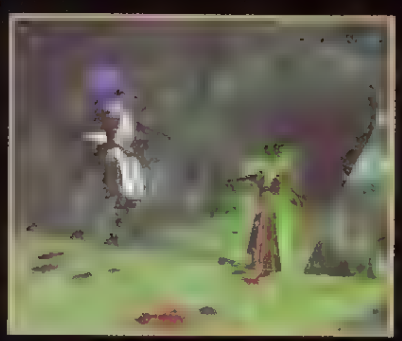

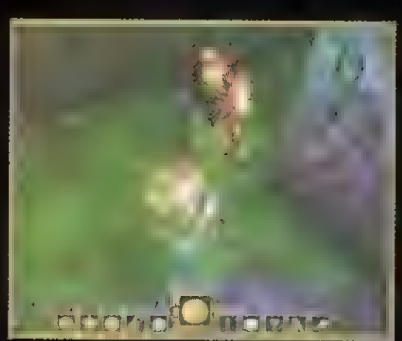

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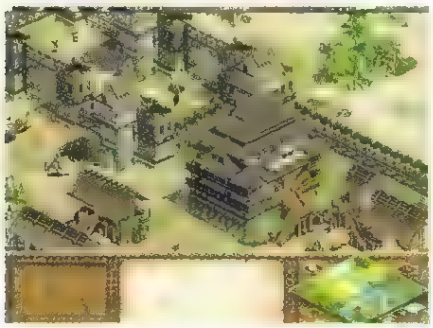
It's *that* time of year again. The season of (shudder) giving. And if there's a PC gamer in your life, finding the right gift can be a nightmare. There are so many breeds of gamer, from the casual to the hardcore, that it's difficult to know what kind of hardware or software gift might be appropriate. To that end, we've put together a foolproof digest of 40 gaming gifts covering the entire spectrum of price and product type. If you can't find something in here for that special gaming somebody, there's no hope for you!

FOR THE GAL WHO WOULD RATHER WATCH THE HISTORY CHANNEL THAN TNT'S 24-HOUR *A CHRISTMAS STORY* MARATHON:

Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings

Microsoft

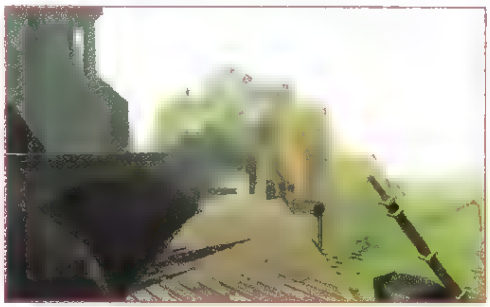
Dan Morris's dad isn't much of a gamer, and usually has difficulty with any PC game more complicated than golf. But sit that man down in front of a documentary on the phalanx structures of the Spartan Army, and there ain't no moving him for the next hour. So it was no surprise that Microsoft's *Age of Empires* obsessed him for much of last year. You can bring that joy all over again with the follow-up, *AOE II: The Age of Kings*, which lets you command civilizations like the Vikings, Celts, and Mongols (Let's face it: who hasn't dreamed of commanding Mongol hordes?). Joan of Arc, William Wallace, and Genghis Khan all make appearances in the historical campaigns. Free Internet play over Microsoft's MSN Gaming Zone will ensure that dad's interest will be held for the holidays and beyond



FOR THE GAMER WHO STILL JUST DOESN'T GET IT, BUT WHOM YOU HAVE TO BUY A GAME FOR ANYWAY:

Myst Masterpiece Edition

Red Orb Entertainment



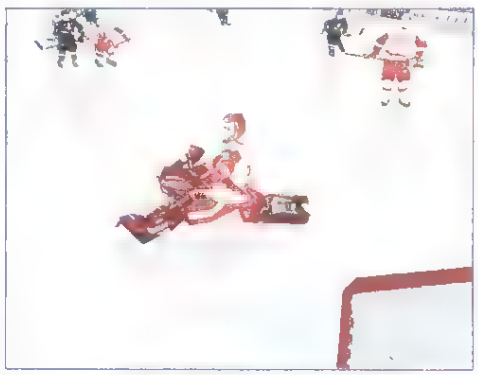
We've said a lot of bad things about *Myst*. Forgetting for a moment that we rated *Myst* an Editor's Choice way back when it first appeared, we've pretty much joined the rest of the hardcore gaming world in writing it off as a cryptic, slow-paced puzzler. But sometimes we need to climb down from our ivory tower and realize that a cryptic, slow-paced puzzler is occasionally exactly what the doctor ordered for fledgling PC owners who lack the capacity to tackle hardcore games right out of the gate. So here's our suggestion: Buy *Myst* for the computer-user in your life who isn't into games. Let *Myst* work its cryptic magic. And then let the newly addicted gamer know that there's a world of deeper, richer games out there to be played.

FOR THE GUY WHO JUST WANTS HIS TWO FRONT TEETH FOR CHRISTMAS:

NHL 2000

EA Sports

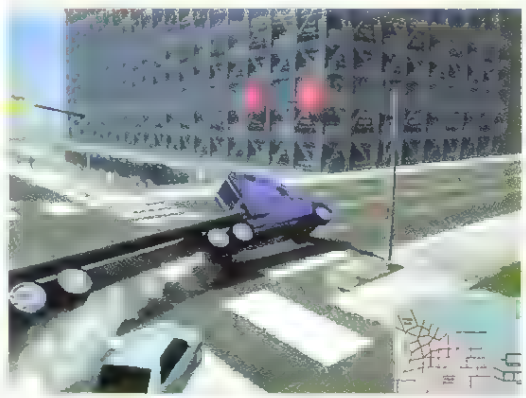
Don't let anyone tell you differently — hockey is the greatest sport in the world. That dentally bereft, mumbling fool who wears the Toronto Maple Leafs jersey to work every day is actually a member of the most enthralling sports elite that ever was. And you can be absolutely sure he'd get a kick out of EA Sports' *NHL 2000*, which takes the fabled PC hockey franchise to a new plateau. Featuring enhanced 3D graphics and a more realistic physics model, the latest update to computer gaming's most revered hockey game even adds a nifty feature that allows players to import their own faces into the game. So now that guy's tooth less mug you cherish so dearly can appear where he has always dreamed of appearing — on an NHL rink. Free Internet play over the EA Sports server is the final cherry on this excellent sports package.



FOR THOSE TO WHOM A SPEEDING TICKET IS A CHALLENGE TO THEIR FUNDAMENTAL LIBERTIES:

Midtown Madness

Microsoft



Imagine a game that took the essence of a FOX "World's Scariest Police Chases" special and transposed it onto your home PC — and, just for funsies, set the whole shebang in the accurately modeled streets of Chicago. You're either seething with self-righteous fury or jumping for joy, and if it's the latter, then you'll definitely want to pick up Microsoft's *Midtown Madness*. You get to take your pick from among an array of vehicles that include a Volkswagen Bug, a '99 Ford Mustang, a semi truck, and a bus. Also included are streetlights, mailboxes, storefronts, and, needless to say, about a million other cars to smash into. You can create epic pile-ups, flee from the pigs ..you name it. It's just good, clean fun

Continued on page 89

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Target sited 500 meters out
wind – 5 knots
out of the west
2 rounds left in
the MAGAZINE
If the 1st one misses,
the 2nd one WON'T
DELTA FORCE 2
YOU CAN RUN BUT YOU'LL
JUST DIE TIRED
Available Fall 1999
Featuring NovaLogic's VOICE-OVER-NET –
If you're typing, you're DEAD!
The ONLY game with the Voxel Space® 32 engine that allows you to truly interact with your environment – CONCEAL yourself in deep grass, TAKE COVER in hillside crags and TARGET enemies over a kilometer away. Plus...
NEW weapons, equipment, story-based missions and weather effects like rain, wind & fog
Take control with the new COMMANDER'S SCREEN
Large-Scale Multiplayer combat with up to 50 PLAYERS
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Large & Loud Internet Gaming
NOVALOGIC
THE ART OF WAR™

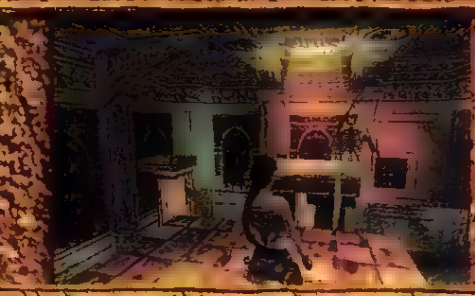
Go to www.pcgamer.com/request Product #522

CORE
In ancient Egypt, it was common practice to have your internal organs removed and your brain pulled out through your nose.
Of course ancient Egyptians were lucky enough to be dead first.
PlayStation
TEEN
T
PC CD

Could the next tomb Lara Croft enters be her own? Find out in Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation, her latest adventure. With seamlessly integrated gameplay and FMV sequences, new skin and 3-D texture mapping, diabolical new puzzles and a totally new inventory control system this is a totally new Tomb Raider. Let's just hope it's not Lara's last.

TOMB RAIDER THE LAST REVELATION

tombraider.com



Build your own Wish List at gamestop.com and e-mail it to anyone who cares. They'll be linked back to all the hottest titles, hint books and accessories you got commin' to you!

gamestop.com
Babbage's & Software Etc.

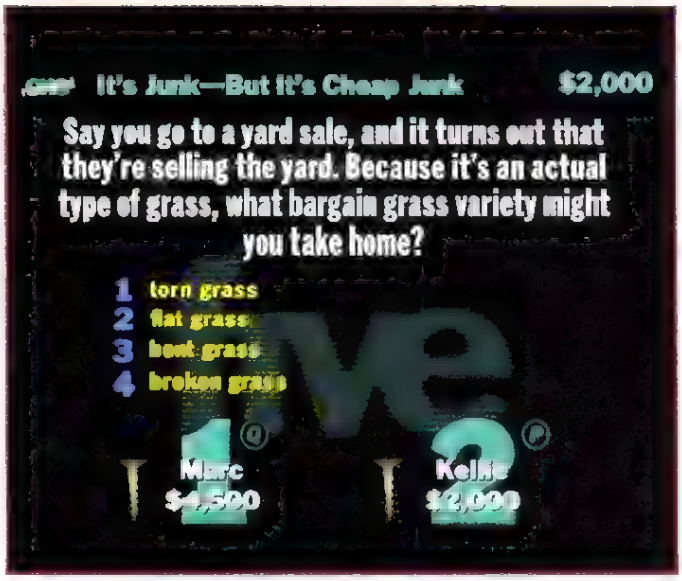
www.gamestop.com

WIN A $1,000 OF YOUR WISH LIST!

Go to www.pcgamer.com/request Product #005

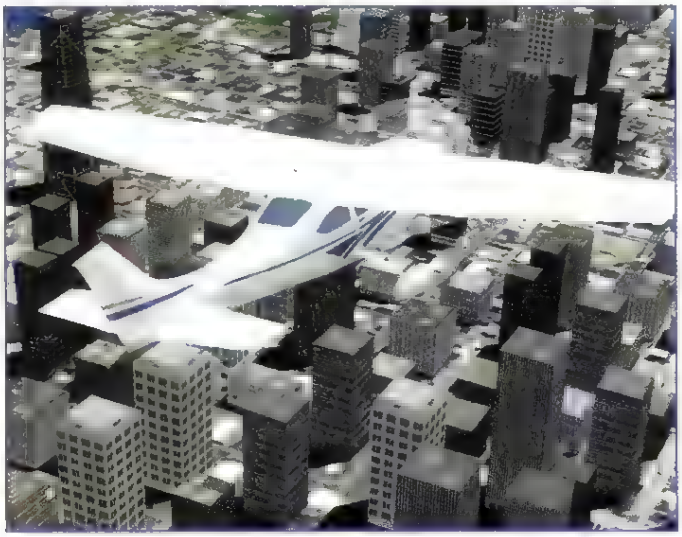
FOR FRIENDS WHO LIKE TO SCREW THEIR NEIGHBORS:

You Don't Know Jack Offline


It's Junk—But It's Cheap Junk
$2,000
Say you go to a yard sale, and it turns out that they're selling the yard. Because it's an actual type of grass, what bargain grass variety might you take home?
1 torn grass
2 flat grass
3 bent grass
4 broken grass
Marc
Kelly

Berkeley Systems

Forget *Quake*, *Half-Life*, and *Command & Conquer*: when it comes to party games, the undisputed champ is *You Don't Know Jack* from Berkeley Systems. In case you're one of the unlucky few who have yet to encounter its singular brand of irascible wit, *YDKJ* is set up like a buzz-in game show. The questions offer some surprisingly challenging knowledge and logic tests, and offer all kinds of amusing side games (like the famous "Gibberish Question," which sends all the players into a race to decode a garbled message that only slowly reveals itself to be an answer). And once you hear the game's cocky, whip smart announcer, game show hosts will never sound up to the task again. His riffing is often racy, always funny, and light years ahead of Pat Sajak.



FOR THE FRUSTRATED BUSINESS TRAVELER:

Flight Simulator 2000

Microsoft

Few software franchises have demonstrated the kind of longevity that Microsoft's flight sim line has. Going strong now for more than fifteen years, the Flight Simulator series has always offered fans of commercial flight a well-regarded civilian sim. The series gets a significant overhaul for its millennium edition, including the addition of a Bell helicopter and the awe-inspiring Concorde superjet. Best yet, *Flight Sim 2000* will feature downloadable real-time weather with help from the same weather satellite database that actual airlines use for their flight plans. So if you want to fly from any of the game's thousands of airports to any other, you can do it using the weather conditions that exist right at that very moment. There are a few decent challengers to Microsoft's civilian flight throne, but this is still at the top of the heap

FOR THE SON, HUSBAND, OR BOYFRIEND YOU WON'T MIND NEVER SEEING AGAIN...

EverQuest

Sony

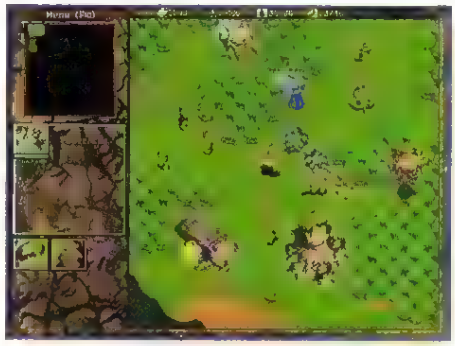
Be very sure about this gift, because the odds are you may be sentencing your loved one to an addiction worse than methamphetamine. Sony's *EverQuest* takes gamers into the fantasy realm of Norrath, where their every Dungeons & Dragons glory can be acted out in glorious full 3D. The real beauty of the game is that it's populated with thousands of other human players, all sharing one huge, constantly evolving gameworld. Games persist even after the computer is switched off — when you come back later, the world has continued to change around you. This is finally what fantasy gamers have been waiting for: An addictive, graphically appealing world in which they can play with elves, gnomes, and trolls to their hearts' content. RPG fans will love it, but you'd better forget about them ever straying from their computer desk again

FOR THE TRUE GAMING CONNOISSEUR:

WarCraft II Battle.net Edition

Blizzard Entertainment

When fans of real-time strategy games reminisce, *WarCraft II* is usually the game they're thinking about with that dreamy look in their eyes. A game that set the standard for the RTS model, Blizzard's inventive battle of orcs versus humans featured a revolutionary and influential multiplayer mode. With the recent announcement of *WarCraft III*, Blizzard has decided to do fans a big favor and release an Internet-compatible edition of the classic *Tides of Darkness*. This release will allow users to connect over Blizzard's brilliant gaming server, Battle.net, a free and simple hosting service that lets players link up online and tear apart the realm of Azeroth over and over again. People who love *Diablo* and *StarCraft* already swear by Battle.net, and the ability to play *WarCraft II* over that network has been long awaited.



FOR ALL THOSE WELL-ADJUSTED, PEACE-LOVING KIDS WHO FEAR ACTUAL GUNS:

Quake III Arena

id Software

What else can be said about id Software? The most influential PC game company ever? Almost certainly. The most controversial ever? Perhaps. *Doom* reinvigorated action gaming, and spurred many a mother to worry about her son's sudden fondness for fragging and gibbing. We're here to tell you that computer fragging and gibbing are A-okay, and that *Quake III Arena*, id's latest, is sure to be a hit gift for any action fan. Featuring some of the most amazing graphic effects of any 3D game in history, and with a renewed emphasis on online play, *QIII* carries on a successful tradition of multiplayer mayhem. Don't believe the anti-hype — *Quake III Arena* is a can't-miss title for just about anybody who enjoys a little cathartic action gaming every now and again.

FOR THE GAMER WITH A LITTLE DEVIL INSIDE HIM:

Dungeon Keeper 2

Electronic Arts

How's this for an evening's amusement: torture minions, slap your underlings around, force them to perform backbreaking labor in your underground tunnels, and lay fatal ambushes for noble explorers? It's all part of the fun of *Dungeon Keeper 2*, a "demon sim" that puts you in charge of a grim subterranean lair. Not only do you have to constantly upgrade your foul dungeon, you have to be aware of the financial needs of maintaining its workforce, and be on guard against outside threats. Featuring such questionable characters as the Horned Reaper and a masochistic dominatrix, this may not be everybody's idea of a rollicking good time. But those with the right kind of appreciation for black humor will find a lot to chuckle at here

FOR... SOMEBODY YOU DON'T LIKE VERY MUCH.

The Duke Nukem Music CD

Red Ink

Hey, we love Duke as much as the next person. In fact, we put him on this month's cover. But let's be real: just because a product is endorsed by the Big Fella doesn't mean it's worth your dollars. In fact, in the case of the Duke Nukem soundtrack album, you're advised to run, don't walk, in the opposite direction. This is a perfect gift for anyone you have a personal problem with and has any semblance of musical taste. Filled as it is with the tuneless heavy-metal rigmarole that only Greg Vederman could appreciate, you'll be slogging your way through endless hair-band riffs from the likes of Megadeth and Eardrum Scratchers. Even in the very subjective world of rock music, this stuff is just crap. Fun parlor game: Buy your "friend" the CD, make him play it, and laugh as he has to squirm through this garbage and pretend to like it for your sake.

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AGE of EMPIRES II
THE AGE OF KINGS
You were not born noble,
but your destiny is to reign as king.
✦ Command your knights in menacing formations.
✦ Dominate the world's marketplaces.
✦ Embody the spirits of William Wallace, Saladin, Barbarossa, Joan of Arc, and Genghis Khan.
✦ Listen to monks speak of thirteen unique warriors and civilizations, all in their own dialects.
✦ Achieve victory through conquest, economic stranglehold, or exploration.
✦ Find more glory at www.microsoft.com/games/age2
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PLAY 1 FREE ON ZONE.COM
ENSEMBLE STUDIOS
TEEN
Microsoft
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WHEN DYING FOR THE EMPIRE WAS AN HONOR...

TALONSOFT'S

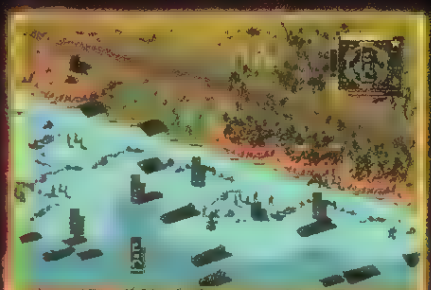
RISING SUN™

In 1941, Japan unveiled plans to bring the western Pacific under its control. Suddenly, the nations of the western Pacific faced the most dangerous enemy ever...men who considered it an honor to die in service of the Empire of the Rising Sun!

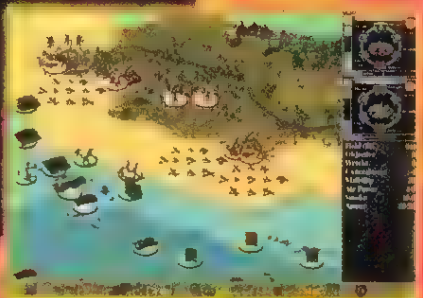
Raise the flag at Iwo Jima with ***TalonSoft's Rising Sun™!***

- *Platoon-level ground war in the Pacific*
- *30+ Scenarios and 3 "Linked" campaigns*
- *Detailed terrain includes, rice paddies, coral reefs and dense jungles*

Ambush on the road to Rangoon



G.I.s wade ashore on Wadke Island



Marines land in the Central Pacific

BANZAI!

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Ava lable January 2000 Check it out at your local retailer www talonsoft com or call 1-800-211-6504
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FOR THE DESKTOP GENERAL:

The Operational Art of War

Talonsoft

Let's be frank. It's just a bunch of not-very-interesting mapboards and little tiny units with weird symbology all over them. But set it down in front of a hardcore wargamer, and it's like putting a toddler into the world's biggest sandbox. *The Operational Art of War* features detailed re-creations of almost every military engagement of World War Two, and its numerous add-on packs keep the fun going all the way through the latter half of the twentieth century's history of armed conflict. The detail level is incredible, with command, supply, and combat controlled down to the tiniest variable. Even better, the whole thing is customizable, allowing users to shape their own scenarios and orders of battle in almost any configuration they want. It's a wargamer's paradise

FOR THE GAMER WHO WANTS TO CRY WHEN HE DISCOVERS JUST HOW SLOW HIS COMPUTER REALLY IS:

3DMark 99 MAX PRO

Futuremark Software

While it certainly isn't for every gamer on your Holiday shopping list, Futuremark Software's excellent *3DMark 99 MAX PRO* benchmarking suite is perfect for the gamer who's always looking to squeeze that extra bit of power from his system and/or 3D accelerator card. *3DMark* puts those tweaks to the test by running dozens of small benchmark programs on your video card and system, and then giving the results in either a total overall score, or individually — test by test. Also, since we use this program ourselves when testing video cards and computers, the special gamer in your life will be able to cringe in pain and recoil in fear when he discovers that for all his tweaking and extra money spent, his overclocked Celeron is still only a hair faster than a 486SX.

FOR THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE YOU'D REALLY LIKE TO PUSH OUT OF A HIGH-FLYING AIRPLANE:

Skydive!

Electronic Arts

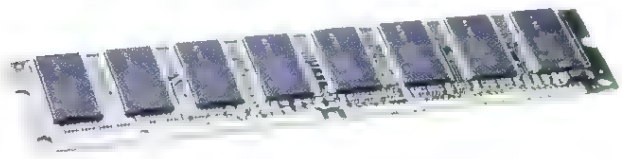
"Wow! Johnny I can't believe Christmas morning is almost here!" "Me either, Billy! What do you think mom and dad got us this year?" "Gosh Johnny, I don't know, I bet I got that new bike I've been wanting! It's a got a banana seat and everything! How about you, Billy? What do you think they got you?" "Well, if I had to guess, I'd bet it was that new Green Machine I've been begging for. You've seen it, right? It's like a Big Wheel, but way cooler!" "I can't wait any longer, Billy, lets go down and find out what we got!" "Okay, let's go!"

And with that, Billy and Johnny slip out of their beds and scramble downstairs, but instead of seeing presents under the tree, all they see are two copies of the utterly awful *Skydive!* staring them in the face. Upon seeing this, both boys walk back upstairs crying, swearing on everything they hold dear that *next* year they'll be good little boys.

FOR THE GAMER WHO'S SICK AND TIRED OF IN-GAME S-T-U-T-T-E-R-I-N-G:

128MB RAM

RAM prices have been going crazy as of late. One week, the price of 128MB DIMM of PC-100 SDRAM costs 70 bucks, and the next week, it's back up to $236! Some of the recent price increases are artificial, but a lot of it probably has more to do with the huge earthquake that just wreaked havoc on Taiwan. Although this item might not be the least expensive gift on our list come this holiday season, it's still potentially one of the most important depending on how much RAM you currently have under the hood. Today's games are bigger recourse hogs than ever, and adding the extra RAM can often give such games a huge leap in performance — both in their load times and playability. Simply, the more RAM you have, the more game data can be stored there so that the program doesn't have to get it from the hard drive, which can create stuttery performance, often during key moments (such as when you open a door in *Rogue Spear* to reveal a terrorist behind it!). While adding RAM won't increase your frame rates in the normal sense, what it will do is get rid of a lot of stuttering associated with hard drive swapping when you don't have enough system memory. Truly, the gift that keeps on giving!



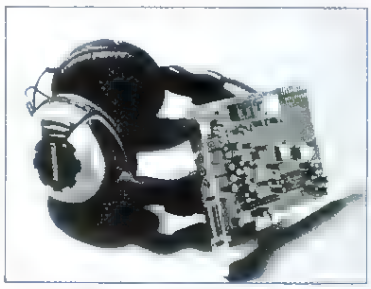
FOR THE GUY WHOSE HEAD JUST DOESN'T VIBRATE ENOUGH ON ITS OWN:

Xitel Force Feedback Headphones

Xitel

Xitel's Force Feedback headphones are exactly the sort of thing you'd never imagine yourself ever needing. After all, what's wrong with a nice set of standard headphones? We thought the same th ng until we tried these puppies out.

Taking advantage of a technology based on tactile feedback, Xitel's headphones actually rumble along with low frequencies The effect is surprisingly satisfying, and after a few minutes, you're left feeling like the rumbling is simply added bass. For rock music these puppies really purr, but the real fun starts when you set them on your lap and crank up some serious hardcore gangsta rap... uh, never mind.
Forget you read that.



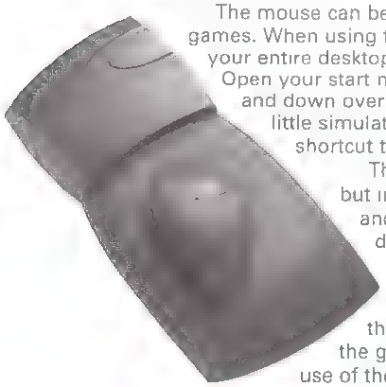
Actually, the fun starts when you play action games like *Quake* and *Unreal*. Shotgun and laser blasts threaten to pop your eyes right out of your head at high volumes Thankfully, the feedback sensitivity can be adjusted or turned off all together if your ears start bleeding.

FOR THE GAL WHO WANTS IT ALL AND A BAG OF CHIPS:

Logitech Force Feedback Mouse

Logitech

Yes, really, a force feedback *mouse*. Based on technology licensed from I-Force, this revolutionary rodent can either act as a standard force feedback mouse, or simulate a feedback-enabled joystick, complete with centering tension. This simulation mode is where you'll get the most use out of the mouse currently, as the only games written to take specific use of its features ship with the device itself.



The mouse can be used for many things other than games. When using the mouse's included software, your entire desktop can be made to have textures. Open your start menu, for example, and slide up and down over all the shortcuts, and you'll feel little simulated ridges as you move from one shortcut to the next Very cool.

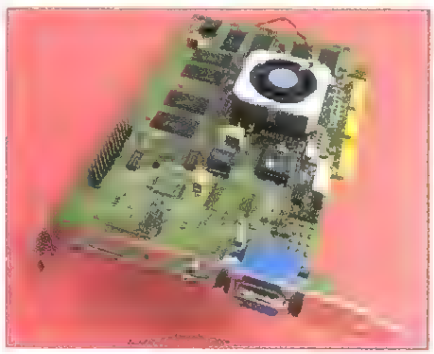
The motor itself isn't in the mouse, but in the base unit the device is anchored to. This fact might pose difficulties for first person shooter fans, as circle strafing can be difficult without being able to raise the mouse off the pad. Overall, though, we look forward to seeing the games that end up making good use of the technology.

FOR ANYONE LOOKING FOR THE HOTTEST, MOST POWERFUL, STUPIDLY NAMED 3D CHIP ON THE PLANET:

NVIDIA GeForce 256

Creative Labs, Guillemot, and others

In the history of graphics chips, marketing types have come up with some pretty cool names. Let's see... There's been the Voodoo, ViRGE, Savage 3D, Rage, TNT, and Verite, just to name a few. But what in the world was NVIDIA thinking when it came up with GeForce 256 as the name of its new, high powered wonder chip? Come on guys! What happened to the cool sounding chips like Riva 128 and TNT Ultra? Heck, if someone was to read "GeForce" phonetically, they might even get bit offended (it's pronounced gee-force, by the way). Still, since it is the world's first consumer-level GPU (graphics processing unit), meaning that it supports transforms and lighting in hardware, and cards built using it are the fastest video boards ever made, we'll try to live with it. For the Holidays, look for the Creative Labs Annihilator and Guillemot Prophet 3D — both are GeForce 256 based cards. They'll rock your world in OpenGL and Direct3D accelerated games!



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INTELLIGENT GANG WARFARE

Earn Respect

Get Work

Fight in a Gang

Betray your Bosses

Join your Enemies

Start Turf Wars

Foster Cars. Sustain Stereos.

Massacre Bad Guys.

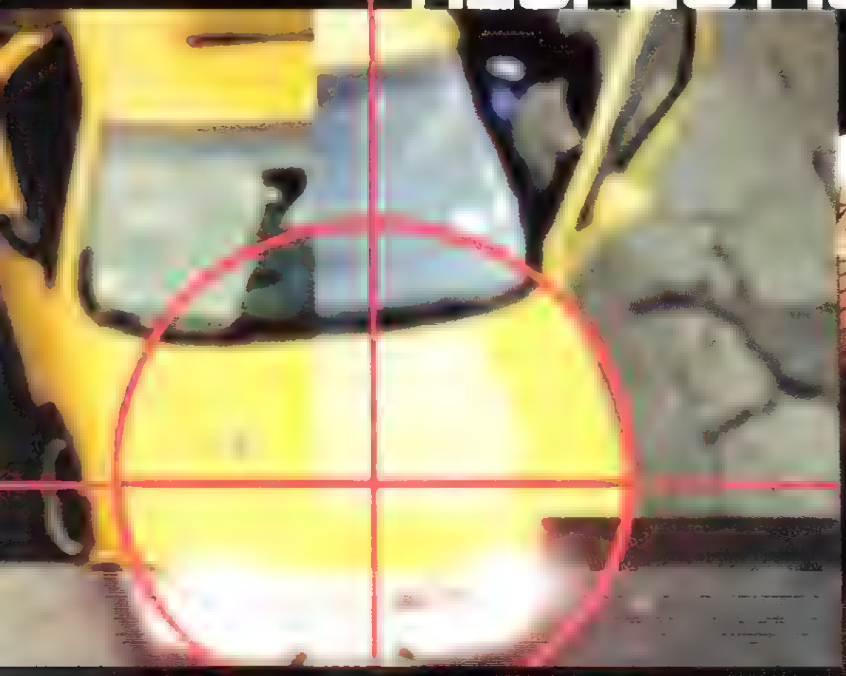
More Aggressive Police.

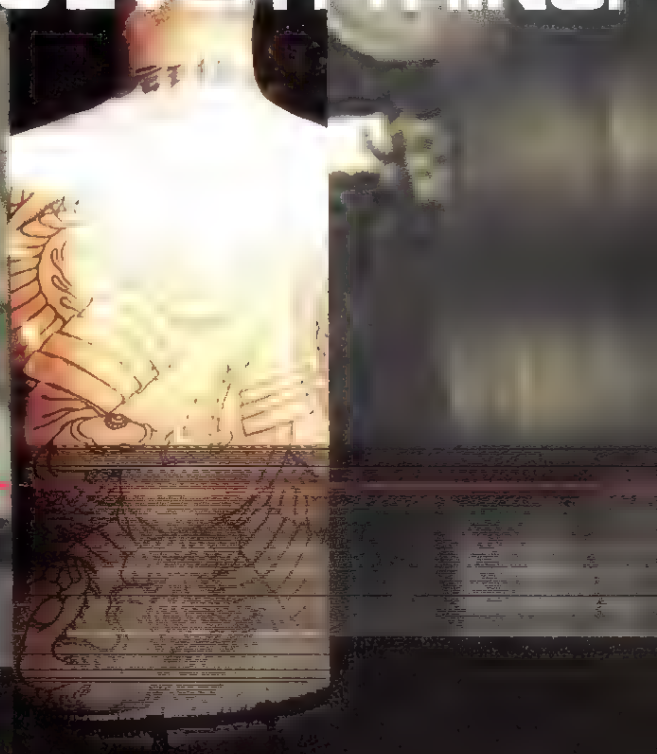
And Now, the FBI and the Army are getting involved.

GRAND THEFT AUTO IS BACK

GTA2

RESPECT IS EVERYTHING.





GET THE DEMO AT:
WWW.GTA2.COM

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PC CD ROM

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

DMA Design Ltd.

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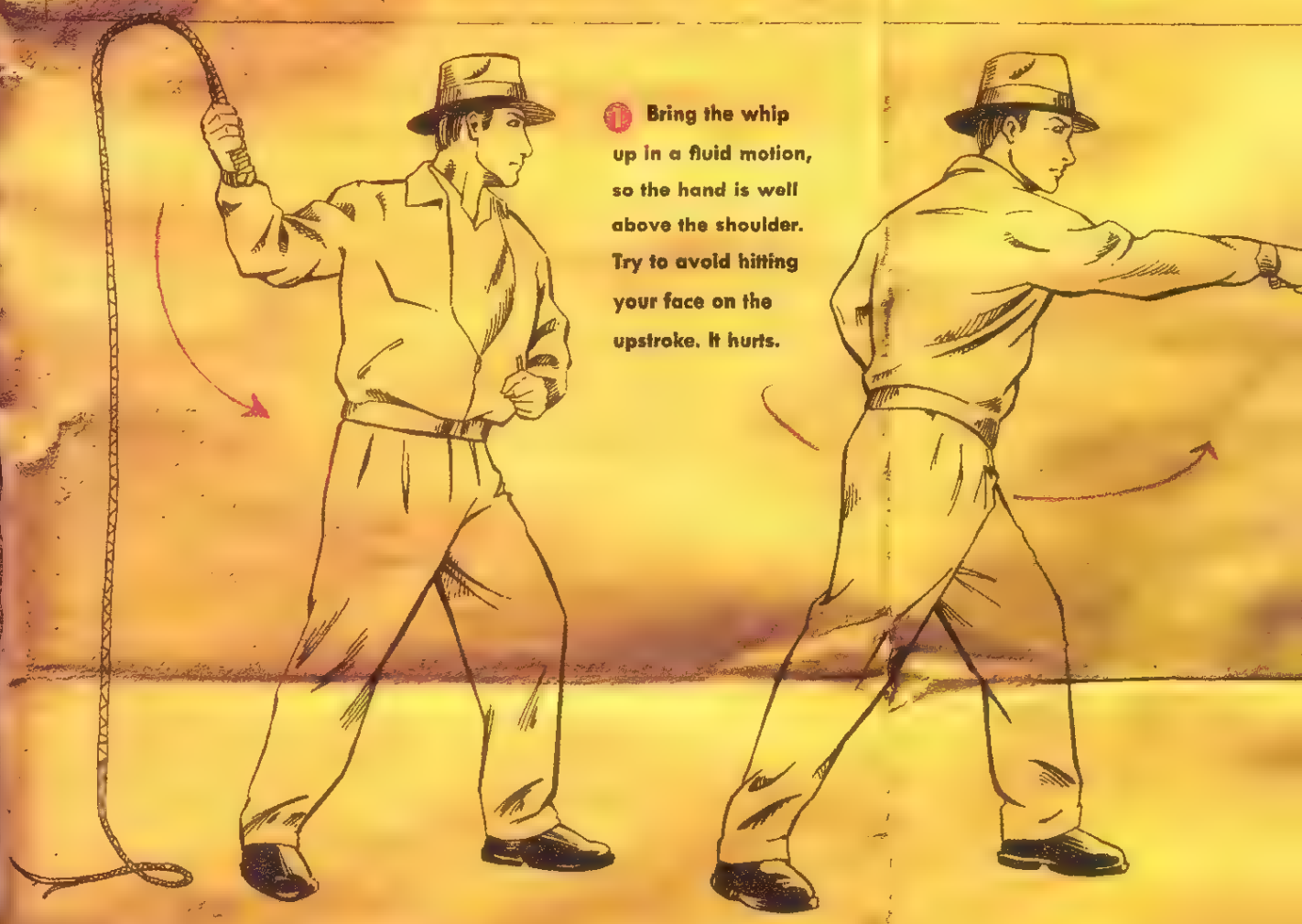
HOW TO USE A BULLWHIP:



1. Bring the whip up in a fluid motion, so the hand is well above the shoulder. Try to avoid hitting your face on the upstroke. It hurts.

ADVANCED TECHNIQUES:

5. Full-contact snake charming.

6. Emergency levitation.

7. Arthropod management.

He takes on snakes, traps, demons and commies. With

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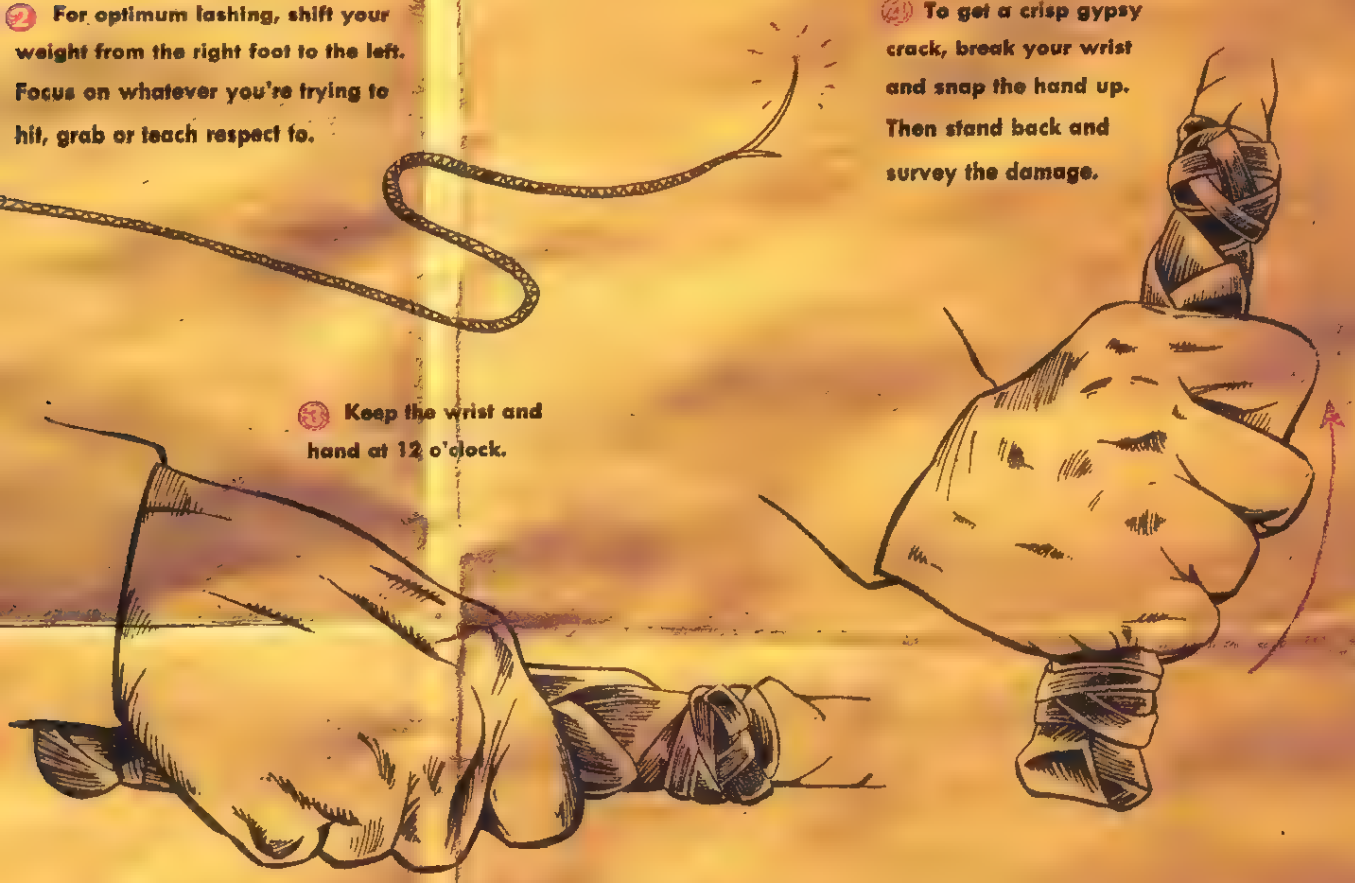
LUCAS Arts

(2) For optimum lashing, shift your weight from the right foot to the left. Focus on whatever you're trying to hit, grab or teach respect to.

(3) Keep the wrist and hand at 12 o'clock.

(4) To get a crisp gypsy crack, break your wrist and snap the hand up. Then stand back and survey the damage.



(8) Relic snatching.

(9) Commie weapons extraction.

the fate of the world on the line, the whip gets one wicked workout. Indy's back.

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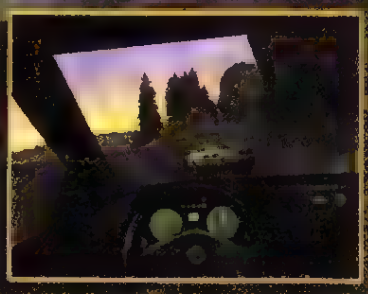
you'll have to scrape the bugs off your monitor.



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PlayStation

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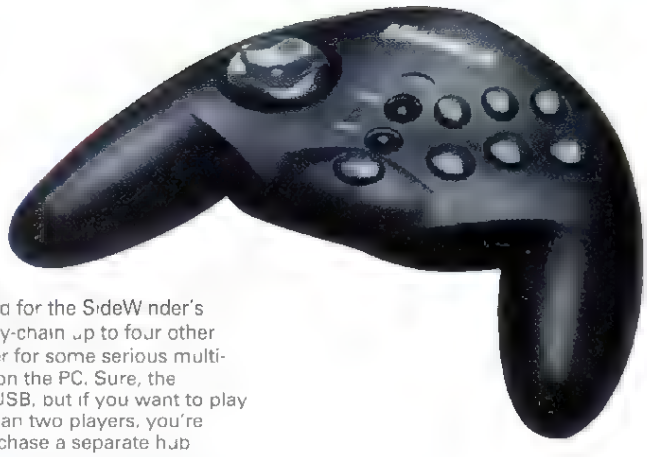
FOR THE GAMER LOOKING FOR THE BEST OF THE "BATARANG-INSPIRED" GAMEPADS:

Original Microsoft SideWinder Gamepad



Microsoft

Who'd have thunk it? After all these years, Microsoft's original SideWinder Gamepad is still the best gamepad inspired by a Batman comic — and it's better than the ones that don't take cues from Gotham City's finest, too. Sure, there have been contenders to the throne (including a new, "improved" SideWinder Gamepad Pro), but even the best of the bunch can't compete with the original SideWinder pad when it comes down to a pound for pound beat-'em-up.

Recently, we were very impressed with Logitech's new WingMan Extreme Gamepad (one of the Batarang variety), but even so, there's a lot to be said for the SideWinder's unique ability to daisy-chain up to four other SideWinders together for some serious multi-player sports action on the PC. Sure, the Logitech offering is USB, but if you want to play a game with more than two players, you're going to need to purchase a separate hub (though admittedly, most of us don't play four player games on PC, so the WingMan Extreme is a very good choice, also).

FOR THE ROLEPLAYER WHO JUST CAN'T WAIT ANOTHER MINUTE FOR *DIABLO II*:

Darkstone

Gathering of Developers

"Dude, I just went down to level 24 without my new +74 armor and my bow that gives +18 to all attributes, and the beasties down there couldn't even get me!" Sound like *Diablo*? It should, because except for a few important differences, *Darkstone* is pretty much a *Diablo* clone.

These differences do make *Darkstone* worth playing, though. Its true 3D engine allows the player to zoom in and out of the action, and one cool feature means that potions in your belt are automatically taken out of your backpack should you need more than you could carry around your waist. This comes in *very* handy when you're in a big battle and don't have time to go into your pack for another healing potion. *Darkstone* may not be the 100 percent genuine article, but it will definitely tide over anyone jonesing for their next dose of *Diablo*.

FOR THAT VERY SPECIAL SOMEONE FOR WHOM MONEY IS NO OBJECT WHEN BUYING HIM OR HER A GIFT:

Alienware/Falcon Northwest Systems

Alienware, Falcon Northwest

Let's get this out in the open before we go any further: If you can afford to buy either a high-end system from either Alienware or Falcon Northwest, you are scum, and that's the way it is. If you think you need computers built using the world's fastest processors and video cards, then you just go right on ahead. But who needs ya! While you're playing all your games on an Alienware system that packs a 733MHz PIII with both a GeForce 256-based card *and* a Voodoo3 or a Falcon Northwest system that comes with a 700MHz Athlon with the fastest, highest clocked Voodoo3 card on the planet, the rest of us will be playing on our silly little PIIs and low-end PIIIs! But we're the true gamers, man! You can't be a hard-core gamer if you can afford systems like these! You're nothing but a bunch of yuppie sellouts!

Seriously, if you're looking to really blow away that special gamer in your life, what better gift than a complete heavyweight gaming rig from either Alienware or Falcon Northwest, the two specialist companies who custom build gaming PCs better than anyone else in the world. Of course whatever you buy will probably be out of date by the time the big ball drops on New Year's Eve, but that's PC gaming for ya.

FOR THE DISCERNING CONSUMER WHO'S LOOKING FOR AN OVERPRICED, BARELY FUNCTIONING PIECE OF CRAP (AND HEY, WHO ISN'T?):

Titans Sphere

SGRL

Lester, having won every single gaming match in every category in the PGL is just not having as much fun as he used to. He beats every person he ever plays games with!

What is Lester to do? Should he give up gaming all together? No, no, no! What Lester needs is the Titans Sphere from SGRL! This uncomfortable waste of plastic can be placed on your lap or in front of you on your desk (just as long as you remember to remove your keyboard since the Titans Sphere wastes a lot of space!), and is intended to be used as a cross between a super futuristic joystick and a replacement for your mouse and keyboard when playing action games. Good thing for Lester, the Titans Sphere fails miserably at both these tasks, and as a result, Lester is relegated back to playing games as well as his three-year-old brother does! The fun is back!

FOR THE GAMER LOOKING TO SHAKE THE VERY PAINT FROM HIS WALLS:

Klipsch ProMedia v.2-400 Speakers

Klipsch

"Oh my freaking God!" Technical Editor, Greg Vederman screamed. "What in the world happened to you?" asked Rob Smolka with a concerned look on his face. "I just got these new 400 watt Klipsch speakers in to test, I set the volume level about half way, turned them on and loaded up *Quake III Arena Test*, and the damn things blew my hair *and* my teeth clean away!" "Wow, that sounds like some serious power!" "Well, Rob, though I'm now bald and bleeding from the gums, I just can't get up from my desk — these speakers just sound *too* good. There are five speakers in all, four satellites and one mother of a subwoofer, and they pack the most power of any PC speakers ever heard of in this category. *And* they're THX certified! Seriously, Klipsch has to be losing money on these things. They're just incredible. If you've got a sound card that supports four speakers output, there are no better speakers on the planet. Now, if I can just find my teeth...."

FOR VIRTUALLY ANY ADOLESCENT:

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation

Eidos Interactive

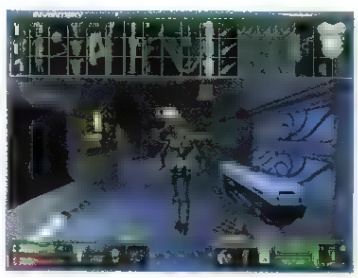
While the action/adventure fans here at *PC Gamer* have been disappointed to see the quality of Eidos' Tomb Raider series trail off with each new iteration, the latest signs are good that *The Last Revelation* (don't say *Tomb Raider 4*!) might just be the game to get the franchise back on track with a return to its roots and some much-needed new features. But even if *TLR* doesn't live up to the promises being made by Eidos and Brit developer Core Design, we find it difficult to believe that there are many teen gamers who wouldn't be happy to find Lara Croft stuffed in their stocking on Christmas morning.

It's no secret that one of the reasons behind the series' phenomenal success has been the allure of Lara — always beautiful, never quite attainable — and she's looking better than ever in this new incarnation, which even features a training mode in which players get to control a teenage Miss Croft (settle down at the back there, you boys). You'll have to wait for the full review next issue to find out if *The Last Revelation* will satisfy genre purists, but it's sure to keep pubescent PC owners quiet until the new year and so has got to be worth recommending on that factor alone.

FOR THE PERSON WHO RECEIVED TWENTY PAIRS OF UNDERWEAR FOR THE HOLIDAYS:

System Shock 2

Electronic Arts



Boxer shorts being one of the most popular Holiday gifts among the legions of the unimaginative, many of us will soon find ourselves graced with an overflow of underwear. But if you're also thinking about giving somebody a copy of *System Shock 2* that may not be such a bad thing, since it's highly recommended that players have plenty of clean shorts while playing this masterpiece of a sequel, particularly if doing so late at night, with the lights down and the volume up.

Aside from its fantastic combination of roleplaying and adventure game design, *System Shock 2* is hands-down the scariest PC game to come down the pipe in some time. The derelict, post-massacre starships that form the game's environments are atmospheric masterpieces — moody lighting, eerie sound, and surprising events conspire to keep your heart pounding and have you leaping out of your seat at every corner. In particular, the almost ethereal, malfunctioning voice of the insane computer SHODAN will induce terrifying palpitations every time she breaks into the ship's P.A. system to offer dire warnings of what she will do to you if you proceed. As Alfred Hitchcock once said, "The suspense is terrible — I hope it will last", and in *System Shock 2*, it will last you a long, long time.

Continued on page 107

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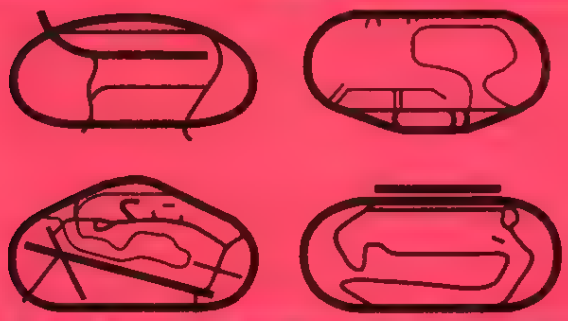

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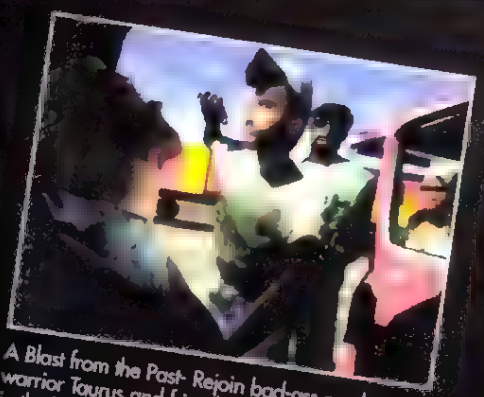

A Blast from the Past- Rejoin bad-ass road warrior Taurus and friends on a drive for revenge in the highly anticipated sequel to one of the best PC games of all time—Interstate '76.

The sequel to "Action Game of the Year"* – Interstate '76.

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FOR UNCLE BOB, WHO THINKS *RAINBOW SIX* IS A SHOW ON THE WEATHER CHANNEL:

Pandora's Box

Microsoft

Of course, not everyone is a hardcore, joypad-wieldin', frag-rackin', Nihilanth-killin' PC games master. As evidenced by the success of such "mainstream" titles as *Scrabble* and *Monopoly*, and the huge popularity of online games like *Hearts* and *Euchre*, there's a huge groundswell of gamers out there who like to take things just that little bit easier. And for those gamers, we recommend the gift of Microsoft's new puzzlefest *Pandora's Box*, a compendium of hundreds of different visual brain-teasers from the grandmaster of geometric dexterity, *Tetris* creator Alexey Pajitnov.

All of Pandora's puzzles can be played in sequence, driven by a slim narrative thread, but most gamers are likely to make more use of the game's freeform mode, which allows you to dip in and out of any given puzzle as the mood takes you. Most puzzles are variations on the simple jigsaw or slidey-tile theme (Pajitnov has obviously not dispensed with his obsession with interlocking shapes) but most of those variations are original and strangely compelling. Most importantly, it's easy to get into and fun to play — the perfect gift, really, for anyone who doesn't know a railgun from a rocket launcher.

FOR THE GUY WHO READS WAY TOO MANY CHEESY TECHNO-THRILLERS:

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear

Red Storm Entertainment

The sequel to our 1998 Action Game of the Year and winner of last month's Game of the Month Award, *Rogue Spear* has a lot more going for it than just one of the most long-winded titles in recent memory.

The Clancy-esque thriller genre has always been somewhat under-served on PC, but *Rainbow Six* gave fans of techno terror something meaty to chew on, fashioning an immersive tactical action game around a story line and rules of engagement faithfully cribbed from Clancy's eponymous novel. This sequel ups the graphics and feature-set considerably and gives players the opportunity to lead their counter-terrorist teams through real-world hotspots, including an incredibly atmospheric virtual Kosovo. One word of warning: Don't consider this as a gift for inexperienced gamers — *Rogue Spear* is notorious for punishing players mercilessly for rookie mistakes.

FOR THE GAMER WHO STILL DOESN'T HAVE *HALF-LIFE* YET:

Half-Life: Game Of The Year Edition

Havas Interactive

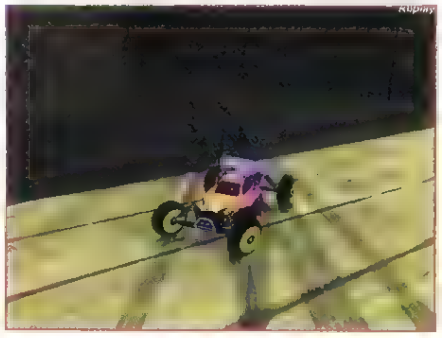
Simply because no real PC gaming library is complete without *PC Gamer*'s newly-crowned Best Game Ever, *Half-Life* really is the only gift worth contemplating for the PC gamer who, for whatever cockamamie reason, still hasn't gotten around to adding this classic to their collection. In fact, there's never been a better time to buy *Half Life*, thanks to its recent re-issue as a *Game Of The Year Edition* which includes the excellent multiplayer add-on *Team Fortress Classic*. For anyone still unfamiliar with *Half-Life* (where *have* you been?), it remains the state of the art in action gaming a full year after its original release with a killer combination of story, level design and AI, and is just plain huge enough to keep you playing long after the last of the turkey/cranberry sandwiches have finally been polished off.

Do be wary of picking this up for anyone whose system requirements may not be up to snuff — using a heavily modified version of the *Quake II* engine, *Half-Life* requires at least 266Mhz and a decent 3D accelerator to enjoy properly, so be sure to check.

FOR THE KID WHO'S PERPETUALLY SMASHING THE RC RACERS HE USUALLY GETS FOR THE HOLIDAYS:

Re-Volt

Acclaim



The RC Racer is a perennial Holiday gift favorite, but the problem with the expensive little suckers is that they're just so darn fragile. Do you really want to spend the rest of your Holidays trawling around town for an open hobby store to sell you replacement parts? Of course you don't, which is why we should be thankful to Acclaim for gracing us with *Re-Volt*, a stunningly fun little simulation of RC Racing. You'll never be picking broken plastic out of the curb again.

Re-Volt puts you in control of a wide array of virtual RC cars, and provides a fun selection of environments over which to race the miniature marvels — everything from a suburban street to a giant toy store and even a natural history museum. The game works great with standard gamepads and driving wheels, but if you want to spend a little extra and add a custom RC-style game controller, you've got an experience every bit as good as — heck, better than — the real thing.

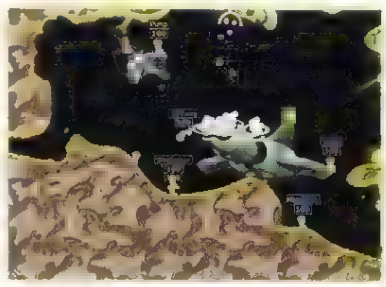
FOR ANYONE WHO EVER LIKED TO TORTURE HIS ARMY MEN IN THE BACK YARD:

Worms Armageddon

Hasbro Interactive

Often, the most surprisingly addictive games of the year come in the simplest packages. That was certainly true of the original *Worms*, a quaint, 2D turn based strategy game in which rival armies of earthworms battle it out with an assortment of weird and wonderful weaponry — and that winning formula has been taken to the nth degree with *Worms Armageddon*, the third and final game in the series.

Though *Worms* is essentially a much deeper game than the simplistic graphics suggest, a good portion of the fun has nothing to do with strategy or tactics — it's the comedic thrills that are to be had watching hapless enemy worms being summarily dispatched by the crazily inventive weapons at your disposal; everything from grenades and bazookas to exploding sheep, mad old women, and a "super banana bomb." *Worms Armageddon* is about as close as you'll get to an "Itchy & Scratchy" cartoon on the PC, and when those hilariously grisly worm demises are combined with some of the most addicting and user-definable gameplay of the year, you've got a winner, through and through.



FOR THE GAL WHO'LL BET ON JUST ABOUT ANYTHING:

Star Wars: Episode I – Racer

LucasArts

As we discovered when this flawed but ultimately exhilarating racing sim first roared into the *PC Gamer* office, sporting events are always much more fun when you have a little wager on the outcome. So as the podracing match-ups between the *PCG* staffers became closer and more fiercely contested, our very own Smolka the Hutt was on hand to open a sports book and start taking big-money bets on who'd be first past the post.

Racer really excels in its multiplayer mode — gather several PCs and competitors around a LAN, and the races can be some of the most thrilling of any driving game of recent years. The sensation of speed is mind-boggling, and if you're anything like us, you will be reaching into your wallet to lay some money on yourself to emerge victorious from the next go-around on the infamous Boonta Classic circuit. *Racer*'s single-player game doesn't offer sufficient challenge to justify the purchase, but if you have access to a LAN — and a good credit line -- those long winter nights will just race by....

FOR THE PERSON WHO ALREADY HAS THREE OF EVERYTHING ELSE ON THE PLANET:

Pioneer PDP-505HD Plasma Display

Pioneer

Okay, you've got more money than you know what to do with, and you want to get a gift for that special gamer in your life that will result in him or her worshipping the very ground you walk on. You can't go wrong with the Pioneer PDP-505HD, a 50" wide-screen, HDTV-ready plasma display.

This svelte (3.86 inches thick), relatively light (94 pounds — hey, the freakin' screen is more than four feet wide...what did you expect?) offers a stunningly sharp picture at resolutions up to 1280x768. The engineers over at Pioneer have also conjured up some magic to brighten up the display, eliminating that annoying "fade to black" look you get with most flat-screen displays when you view them from an angle. And when your gaming is done for the day, the PDP 505HD is the perfect choice for DVD movie watching. With its measly $20,000 suggested retail price, why not buy one for every room in the house?

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FOR THE (FORGIVING) GAMER THAT WANTS TO PLAY *GRAN TURISMO* AT HIGH RESOLUTIONS:

bleem!

bleem!

Let's make one thing perfectly clear: this program is *not* a viable alternative to a real live Sony PlayStation. Besides, since Sony dropped the price of its ubiquitous gaming console to $99, even if it were an alternative, it wouldn't even be that much cheaper anyway (*bleem!* retails for $29.99).

What this nifty little program *does* deliver is a way to play some of your favorite PlayStation games at higher resolutions and with 3D hardware support. Currently, there are around 200 games that work with the software — at least to some degree. Very few, however, operate flawlessly. Among the better performers are *Gran Turismo*, *Tekken 3*, and the Crash Bandicoot series; all games that are only available on the PlayStation, so PC gamers may find the investment in *bleem!* worthwhile if they're interested in these titles.

A positive note is that the product's creators are committed to improving *bleem!* and fairly frequent updates that support additional games and enhance compatibility with existing titles can be found on the company's web site (*www.bleem.com*).

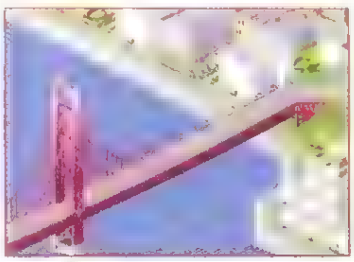
FOR THE MARION BARRY-WANNABE CROWD (SANS THE CRACK):

SimCity 3000

Electronic Arts

Come on, who *wouldn't* want to be the all-seeing, all knowing mayor of his or her own city? Not very many, according to the record-breaking sales numbers posted by each new game in the *SimCity* series.

What gives all of the *SimCity* games their wide-ranging appeal is the open-ended way they play: you can't really win or lose at these games, they're more of a software sandbox. Your job as mayor is to zone land for residential, commercial, and industrial use, give your citizens amenities such as parks and libraries, and to keep the coffers full so that you can keep things running smoothly. It's a concept that should appeal to anyone — not just traditional, hardcore gamers.

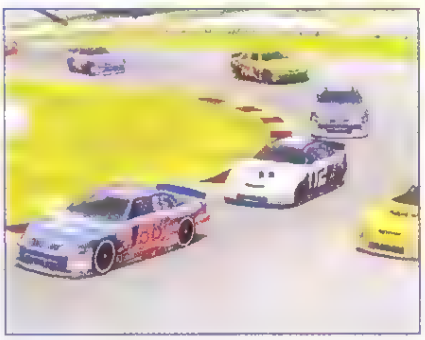


The latest version, *SimCity 3000*, streamlines the interface, making your mayoral tasks much easier, and the graphics deliver a beautiful cityscape, filled with scurrying citizens, bustling traffic, and impressive buildings. This is a game that you can get lost in for days at a time — perfect for drowning out those annoying relatives who always seem to show up on your doorstep at this time of year.

FOR THE GAMER THAT LIKES TO STEER TO THE LEFT...A LOT:

NASCAR 3

Sierra



Forget baseball, football, basketball, and the rest — the *real* national pastime in this country (well, the entire mid-section and most of the south anyway) consists of a group of 43 good 'ol boys roaring around an asphalt oval and jockeying for position in super-powered stock cars. If you're not familiar with the sport of NASCAR racing, you're either dead or your TV hasn't been working for the past 10 years.

Papyrus, the developer of *NASCAR 3*, is the world's premiere developer of racing sims, and their latest effort demonstrates why. The new high resolution graphics stylishly show off all of those corporate sponsor logos that adorn the cars, and the underlying physics engine powers some of the most realistic racing action to be found short of actually strapping yourself into the driver's seat. So, if you or someone on your list thinks that driving in circles *really* fast is like a little slice of heaven, this is the game of choice — it's so realistic you can almost smell the fumes.

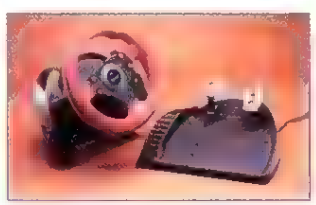
FOR THE SIM FAN THAT WANTS A LITTLE KICK WHEN PLAYING WITH HIS STICK:

Logitech Force Feedback Controllers

Logitech

Playing a simulation on your PC can never *really* approach experiencing the real thing, but the more senses you can get involved, the closer you can get. Most gamers' PCs have the sight and sound portion covered pretty well, but until we can buy a smell and taste add-on board, we'll have to settle for some tactile feedback to heighten the realism.

And no peripheral company does it better than Logitech. There are lots of force-feedback enabled controllers on the market, but only Logitech uses a cable-pull system to deliver some of the most smooth and convincing force effects you've ever felt. The competition uses a clunky motorized method that tends to make the controller feel like it's having a seizure rather than portraying a certain subtle force effect.



Logitech's wheel and joystick are the first controllers that really show the true promise of this technology, and may help to usher in a shining era of feedback-enabled games.

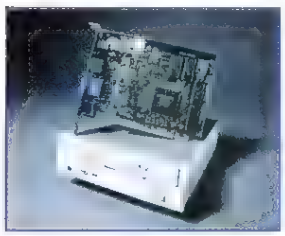
FOR THE CO-WORKER WHOSE PRODUCTIVITY YOU'D LOVE TO SEE DRASTICALLY DIMINISH:

Creative Labs DVD-ROM Drive

Creative Labs

Remember when that ugly beige box on your desk could barely muster the strength to display postage stamp sized video at a silky-smooth three frames per second? The times, they are definitely a changin'

With Creative Labs' latest DVD-ROM kit, you can turn your humble PC into an impressive home theatre. Not only do you get a zippy 6X DVD-ROM (which doubles quite nicely as a 32X CD-ROM), but the package includes a Reel Magic-powered DVD hardware decoder board, which provides unmatched video output quality for playing DVD movies.



We know that when most people buy their PCs they promise themselves that they'll use it for "productive" purposes such as keeping track of their finances or just generally helping to better organize their lives. We also know that this silly idea pretty much goes out the window once they're introduced to the wonderful world of PC gaming. Now, with the ability to watch movies on DVD right there on your PC, you can kiss any hope of balancing that checkbook goodbye forever.

FOR THE PERSON THAT WANTS A SIMPLE WAY TO FRAG HIS OR HER FAMILY MEMBERS:

Diamond HomeFree Phoneline Network

Diamond Multimedia

Unless you live with a bunch of hardcore gamer roommates, setting up a local area network (LAN) for multiplayer gaming in the comfort of your home is probably out of the question — domestic bliss is hard to achieve when you're constantly having to step over thick cables running down every hallway. Traditional Ethernet LANs also have the disadvantage of being fairly complex and costly to set up.

Diamond's HomeFree Phoneline Network package is a convenient way to avoid these potential pitfalls. At a cost of about $100 per PC, all you need to do to get connected is to plug in a network card (PCI or ISA versions are available), attach a phone line to the card, and run the included software which effortlessly guides you through the setup process.

While this system will never match the speed of even the slowest Ethernet LAN (Diamond claims a maximum throughput of about one megabit per second as compared to 100 Mbps you'll find on most office LANs) it should prove sufficient for all of your gaming and file transferring needs.

FOR PEOPLE WITH WEAK STOMACHS WHO CAN'T STAND THE SIGHT OF MOUSE-GUNK BUILDUP:

Microsoft IntelliEye Mice

Microsoft

We don't want to frighten you, but there's something truly disturbing going on inside your mouse. Every time you move that desktop rodent, small particles of hair, dust, Cheetoes, and other indescribable substances find their way into the opening through which that little ball protrudes — and sooner or later the gunk is going to win, turning your mouse into little more than a paperweight.

The kind people of Microsoft want to save you from this cruel fate with its new line of mice sporting a technology known as IntelliEye. The new IntelliEye devices are castrated versions of the traditional mouse design. In place of the rolling ball, these mice feature a tiny camera that photographs the surface they're sitting on 1,500 times per second to determine when and where to move the on screen pointer.

In all other respects, these mice are exactly like the one you have on your desk now. The control is exceptional, and with no moving parts (and therefore, no reason to have any openings to the innards of the mouse), your gunk-removal days will be history.

FOR THE OVERWEIGHT, LOUD-MOUTHED, ARMCHAIR QUARTERBACKS ON YOUR SHOPPING LIST:

Madden NFL 2000

EA Sports

Are you ready for some football? Well, PC pigskin fans, your dreams have finally been answered by the hefty guy up in the booth; John Madden's latest game is the best one yet and sure to please the joystick jockeys who enjoy a little smash mouth grid-iron action.

As is usual for an EA Sports game, *Madden NFL 2000* delivers in the eye-candy department, with sharp player and stadium models, and some of the best animations you'll find in a sports game. It's not all pretty pictures, though; this game kicks some serious butt out on the field. The running game is a major highpoint, and the number of features is as large as Madden's appetite at Thanksgiving. One of the game's few pit falls is the moronic interface; you'll eventually figure it out, but only after several bouts of gamepad tossing and expletive-laden shouting.

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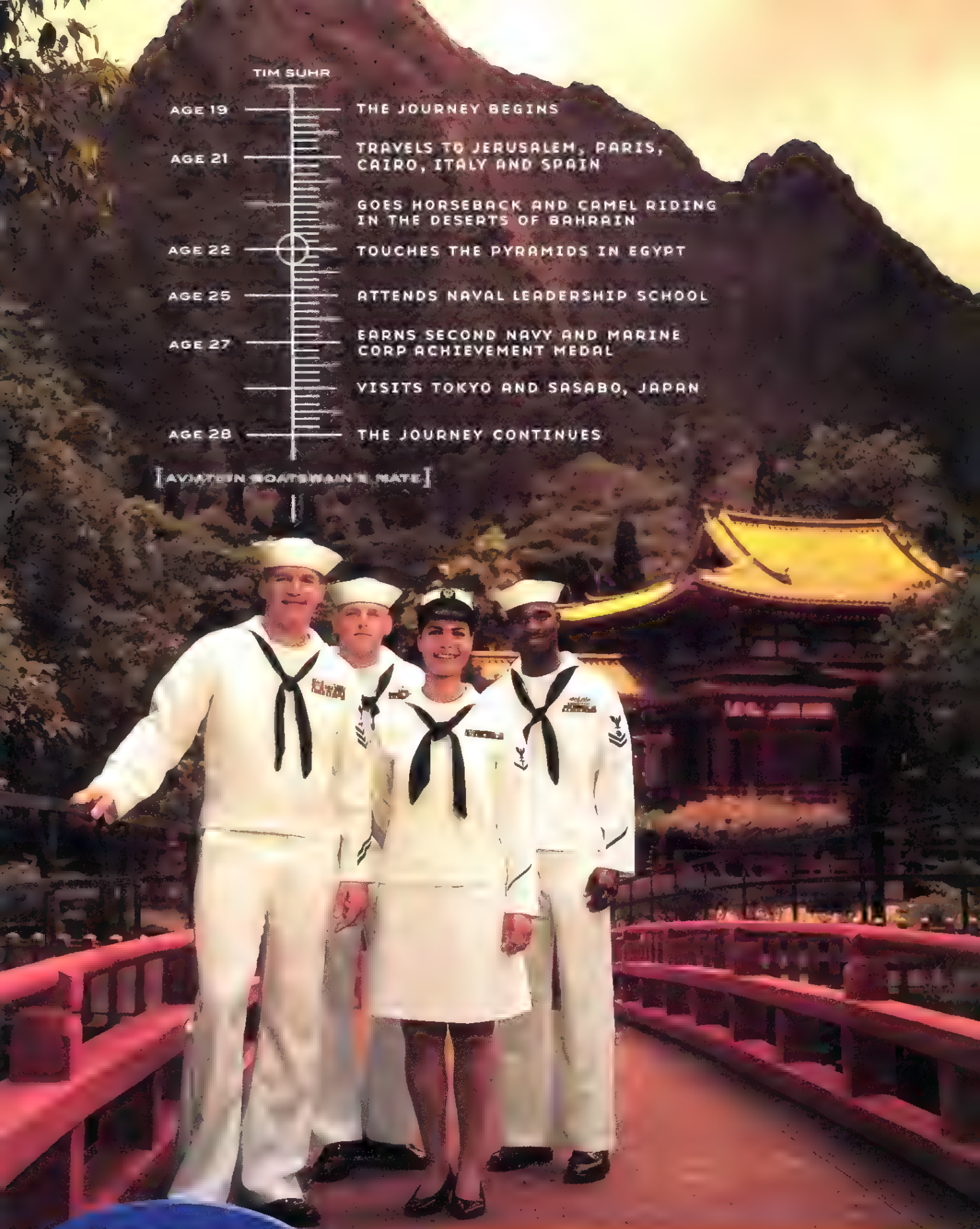

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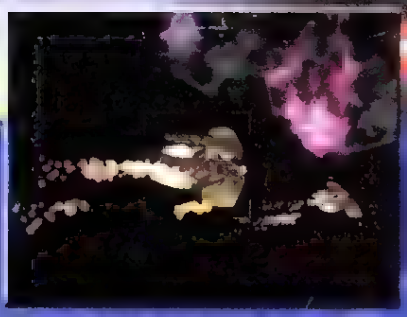
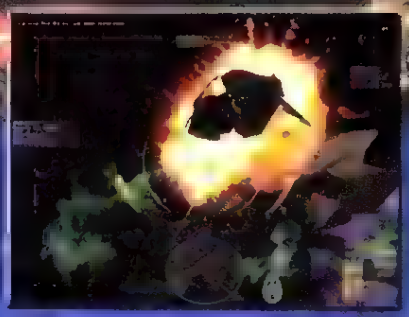
IT'S CLASSIC DOG FIGHTING...



course to attack the massive Shivan fleet.



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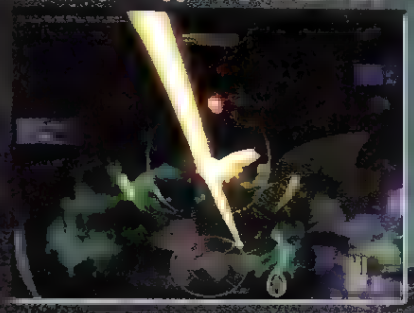

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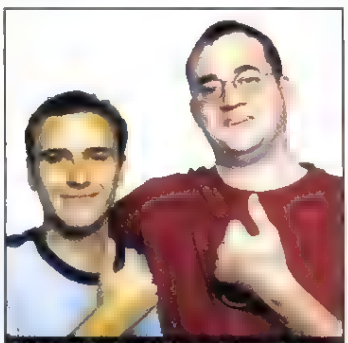
So long, chum...p!

If you're one of those *freaks* who likes to read their magazines from back to front, you may already have read this month's Multiplay column and discovered that Officer William Harms, badge number 81485229, was mercilessly and tragically cut down by a railgun slug in the line of duty this month. No longer will his acerbic wit and unsightly physical presence grace the pages of this fine journal.


Officers Morris and Harms in happier times, before Billy succumbed to a mortal railgun wound and died in total agony.

Billy left instructions in his will that any memorial in the magazine be a joyous celebration of his life, not a grim wake. Unfortunately, we were unable to come up with much in the way of joy or celebration when looking back on Billy's life, but we did manage to scrape together some not-altogether-terrible memories. Billy, if you're up there somewhere reading this, all we can say is, sorry we couldn't do better for you, buddy. Maybe you should have been a nicer guy.

MORRIS: He was a good partner. A good man. I can't remember specifically why, but I seem to remember there was this one really great time when...oh wait, I'm thinking of somebody else.

WHITTA: Whenever I think of Benny, erm, Billy, it's always his amazing gastronomic abilities that spring to mind. Fatso scholars are already debating which of his feats was the greatest. Was it Bucket Week culminating in an entire bucket of popcorn chicken? Or was it the four Ultimate Cheeseburgers in one sitting? Then there is the famous "Entire Appetizer Sampler followed by a steak and Mud Pie the size of a kayak" incident at Black Angus.

VEDERMAN: Ah, yes Billy. How I enjoyed his hilarious antics around the office, his big, booming, paternal laugh, the way he used to bounce me on his knee and ...um, you're not actually writing this down, are you?

SMOKE: Never liked the guy, personally. He smelled like old people.

****Sniff**** Such touching sentiment. Such raw emotion. But seriously Billy, our old bud...We'll miss you. Keep in touch.

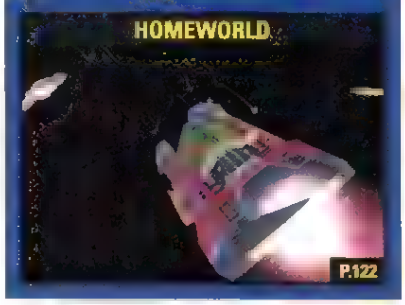
Hardware Requirements

With each *PC Gamer* review, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements and the hardware configurations we recommend as the *least* you'd need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of what you'll *really* need.

THE PC GAMER RATINGS SYSTEM

GAME OF THE MONTH

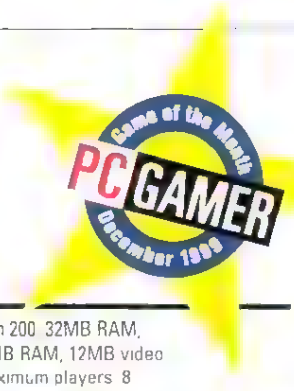
Each issue, we give out the prestigious *PC Gamer* Game of the Month award to the one new title that stands out, head and shoulders, above the rest of the month's releases. Awaaand this month, our winner is:



EDITORS' CHOICE

Every month, we honor the best games we see — those earning 90% or higher — with our Editors' Choice award. It's not easy to earn, and there are a lot of excellent games that fall just short of the honor. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on a game at a local software shop, you can bet it's among the best.

Homeworld



CATEGORY Real-time strategy DEVELOPER Relic PUBLISHER Sierra, (800) 757-7707, *www.sierrastudios.com* REQUIRED Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 100MB hard-drive space, 4MB PCI video card, Windows-compatible sound card WE RECOMMEND Pentium 350, 64MB RAM, 12MB video accelerator card, 600MB hard drive space MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS Modem, Serial, IPX, TCP/IP, Free Internet play WON net, Maximum players 8

Relic explodes onto the scene with a genre-shattering real-time 3D strategy game that will space you out in more ways than one....

The MissionMan software is incredibly complex, largely because it's a very, very powerful tool for making custom missions

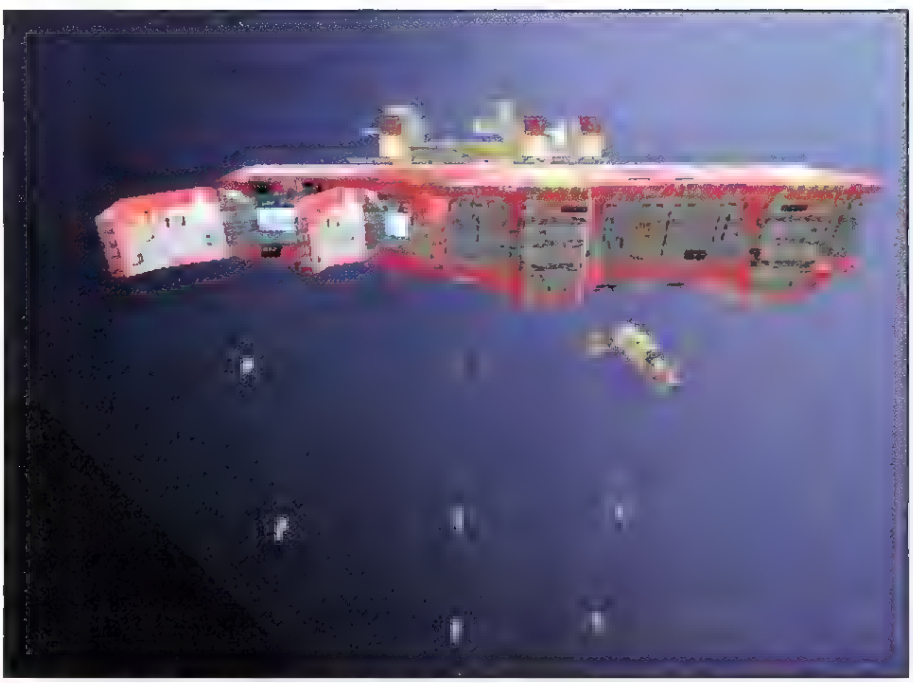
The Sensors Manager screen is essentially a large scale map of the entire area, useful for tracking threats and moving units.

Within a year, we'll know for sure whether *Homeworld* had the same galvanizing effect on the development of strategy games as *Civilization* and *Dune II* did, but one thing is already certain: it moves the genre into compelling new territory. One of the recent hurdles in strategy gaming has been breaking the two-dimensional barrier; with our hands full looking down at units on a map, how could we possibly wrangle massed units that had positions on both the horizontal *and* vertical planes? How could we learn to think and command in three dimensions? With *Homeworld*, Relic provides the answer.

Homeworld's achievements go far beyond moving the 2D combat game into 3D. It's a smart game, not just in gameplay, but in writing and narrative as well. The prime ingredients — graphics engine, control mechanics, scripting, mission structure, and narrative flow — are so fluid, so meticulously integrated that they form a gestalt, an experience that is far more than the sum of its parts. Never, at any point, are you popped out of the game for something so bland as a mission briefing or exposition scene. A few stylized black-and-white line animations add flavor to the story arc, but the main drive of the complex and progressively intriguing narrative is handled in game. Each new mission is like a chapter in a novel. While you know you'll have some combat and resource harvesting to do, you also know that you'll learn more of the mystery at the heart of the tale.

From the start, *Homeworld* sets a dramatic, somber tone that utterly captivates. Majestic in-game images set to a haunting choral adaptation of Samuel Barber's *Adagio* open the game, immediately involving you in cinematic story telling so intertwined with gameplay that it's hard to tell where narrative ends and game begins. The story deals with a race called the Kharak'd (whom we never really see) and their discovery of an ancient ship that points the way to the homeworld of their ancestors. This is merely the jumping-off point for the narrative, but since the plot twists start right from the tutorial, it's not really fair to spoil too much. It's sufficient to say that these folks have many surprises and setbacks in store as they make their way to the homeworld, meeting some strange ancillary races along the way, some hostile, some friendly. You can play as one of two races — the Taiidan or the Kushan — with the differences primarily being in five unique ships and the visual style. This is a little confusing, since the Taiidan and the Kushan are both Kharak'd, and their missions and narrative are the same.

The journey is centered around a mothership, which functions as carrier and foundry. Using resources harvested from asteroids, dust clouds, gas clouds, and nebulae, the mothership builds support ships, strike craft, and capital ships. Research improves existing ships and allows new models to be built, with 30 different ships altogether. The introduction of new units is well-paced. For instance, multi-turret cruisers appear just as you need them against enemy swarmers. Improvements can also be purchased from the enigmatic, star faring Bentusi.



The launch of the Taiidan mothership as it begins its long journey to discover your homeworld.

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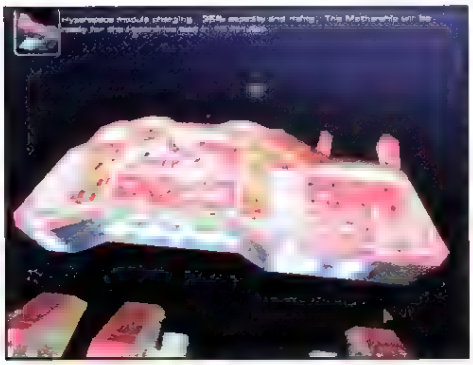
Homeworld's prime ingredients — graphics engine, control mechanics, scripting, mission structure, and narrative flow — are so fluid, so meticulously integrated that they form a gestalt, an experience that is far more than the sum of its parts.

These Ion frigates are firing on enemy capital ships. You can place the camera just about anywhere you need to for the best view of the action. The explosions look great.

Units exist in three-dimensional space, which means they can move pretty much anywhere. Control takes a short period of adjustment, but through a combination of keys and mouse, you soon learn how to deal with that third dimension. By grouping units into fleets and formations, it becomes relatively easy to move them about, set attack aggressiveness and formations, and assign targets. This is aided by the ability to view everything from any angle. The main 3D screen — a gorgeous and detailed view of the action — can be zoomed, rotated, or moved anywhere. A larger scale map provides a good overview of the entire combat area, and enables you move units over greater distances very easily. It can be a handful at times, requiring you to pause to give orders, but rarely does it overwhelm.

This combination of large scale fleet actions and cinematic perspectives creates the most impressive space combat ever created for a strategy game. It's like being in the middle of — and in control of — a *Star Wars* battle. Imagine a strategy game with visuals like *Independence War*, and a couple hundred space ships seen from a scalable third-person perspective, and you'll have some faint idea of just how mind blowing an experience *Homeworld* can be.



Almost all narrative is handled within the game engine, and progresses not only mission to mission but within missions as well.

Mission structure is both a blessing and, until you figure it out, a bane. Early on you learn to beware of event triggers, such as sending a probe to explore that strange beacon at the other end of the map. You realize that it's best not to venture too far without a healthy quantity of banked resources. You also have to stop thinking as you would in a standard strategy game (one whose missions have separate goals). In essence, the single-player game is one huge mission broken into locations, chapters and short-term goals. The ships you build early on can stay with you most of a game if you treat them with care. The unique flow of *Homeworld* is achieved by tying the missions to the narrative and the narrative to the journey of your mothership. The mothership must survive at all costs. It functions as both a carrier, repair craft, and unit builder. You "complete" one mission by entering hyperdrive. All your ships load onto the mothership, and the whole thing hyperdrives to a new location, where they offload to deal with new challenges.

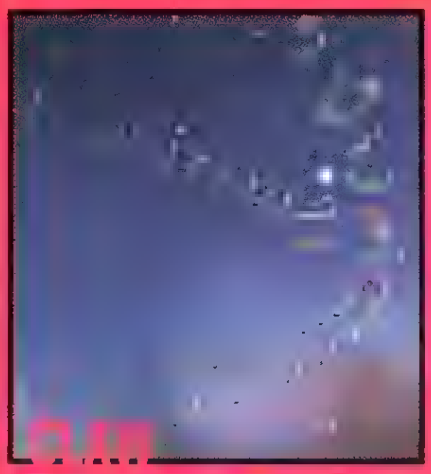
These goals can change in the course of a mission. Even when a task is completed and the mothership hyperjumps out of the area, you may be rudely surprised to find yourself right back in the previous location with even greater headaches. I'm thinking specifically about Chapter 6, where you need to deal with the Protectors of the Gardens by fending off wave after wave of attackers while the hyperdrive charges. This takes eight

USING FORMATIONS

All those formations sure are pretty, but how exactly do you use them, and when? A controversial question among *Homeworld*ers, particularly of the online sort, but here are a few approaches that have proven effective.

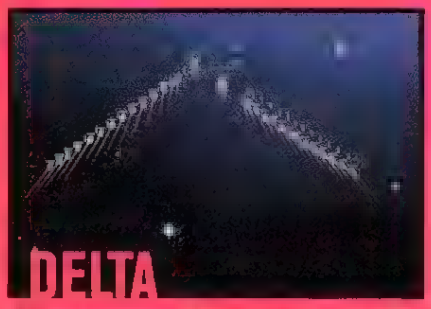
BROAD

"Broad formation" is mostly good for organizing your resources before moving into an actually hostile environment, and not very good for combat.



CLAW

This formation works best for a large fleet based around a core of capital ships. It is certainly the best way to approach a major battle and focus fire on a cap ship. Cap ships can lag behind at the core of the claw while interceptors and corvettes form the talons. Used in conjunction with smaller wedge groupings, it is very effective in full-out battles, since it allows a long duration of sustained fire.



DELTA

One of *Homeworld*'s features is the ability to bind units to more than one group. Binding an entire fleet to group 1, for instance, enables you to approach a battlezone in a tight claw formation. Binding individual, smaller groups of maneuverable interceptors, corvettes, and cruisers within this large formation enables you to splinter off faster attack groups for strafing runs. I've found that splitting some ships into smaller closed assault groups creates the most flexible solution to lightning-fast attack and retreats. Wedge is a good fighter formation, and on a straight-on pass at a target creates a strong concentration of fire.

PROTECTING THE COLLECTOR

A harvester force group should also be assigned to a single key. At least two resource collectors should be included, along with one resource controller. Don't split the collectors up. Let them work in close proximity to better protect them, like a shipping convoy. You can move through the resource fields quickly and efficiently this way. With two collectors and a controller, you'll want at least 20 interceptors, 10 multi-gun corvettes, and an assault frigate or two. Remember that your collectors are always the first target. Use a line of probes to keep an eye on other approaches to the mothership and collector so there are no ugly surprises.

PROTECTING THE MOTHERSHIP

A custom configuration is best for guarding the mothership from all angles of attack, particularly in multiplayer. You'll need to manually position individual ships and groups of ships in space around the mothership, and then bind them all to the same key for easy reference. Top, bottom, left, right, front, and rear all need to be accounted for: you're building a box. It's best to do this in defensive lines, like ripples in water. On the inside line, closest to the mothership, station heavy cruisers at all six points, fairly close to the ship. Leave a repair corvette or two on the inside line as well. In the second line of defense, try to create a "box" of assault frigates two-to-six units long. These have the best firing arcs and can stay put.

SPHERE

I had only used this as a purely defensive formation before talking to designer Alex Garden, who informed me of the "Sphere of Death." By setting Sphere formation and picking a single large target, your fleet will form a sphere around that target and fire *in* at it from every direction. It works!

X

The X is a tight little formation that provides good support and fair flexibility in a full-scale furball. It's better than Claw for attacking multiple smaller targets, but not quite as good for hitting major targets due to the wider spread of fire.

WALL

Wall is best used when positioning mothership defenders, where it helps evenly space your inner and outer "walls" of frigates.

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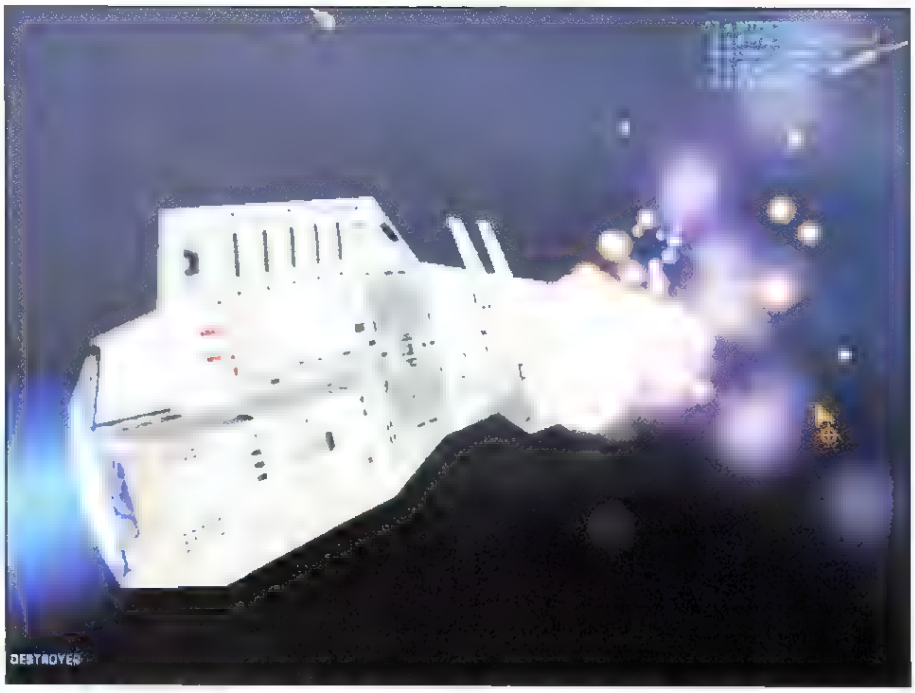
Ion frigates have a powerful beam, but narrow firing arc and poor maneuverability, so they're best hanging back from serious swarms



This is a view of the enemy under fire. You can shift attacks and concentrate fire with amazing versatility using just a few simple keystrokes. Once you learn the basics of game control, playing is a snap.

minutes, and is essentially an Alamo situation. After you've spent uncounted ships and resources buying that precious eight minutes and quickly engage hyperdrive the hyperdrive fails, three satellites create a force field that prevents the drive from working. These must be destroyed but guess what! — the Alamo is still under siege and by this time you're down to a skeleton force and no resources. I was socked so hard by this mission that I had to go back *three* missions and collect every *single* resource on the map to build a larger fleet in preparation. I wasn't keen on this particular juncture of the game, since it was wholly unexpected. It was an object lesson in having to think streamlined, realist c terms. The end of a mission isn't a Get Out of Jail Free card.

Which brings us to the central "issue" with *Homeworld*. (If you're a more negative type, substitute "problem" for "issue.") The single-player game is fairly short for experienced players. I played as the Taiden and finished in about 12 hours. Times will vary from ten hours (experienced gamers) to 25 (relative novices), and there are no difficulty levels to help stretch this out.

The combination of large-scale fleet actions and cinematic perspectives creates the most impressive space combat ever created for a strategy game. It's like being in the middle of — and in control of — a Star Wars battle.

Happily, the multiplayer aspect of the game is a very different, and quite satisfying, story. Hosting via WON.net comes complete with a matching lobby and the early popularity of the title will ensure plenty of opponents to choose from. Games can handle up to eight players and be configured for harvesting or no harvesting options. Bounty Hunter mode rewards kills with resources, and a "chess" variant provides a fixed group of units with no resources. The basic multiplayer structure, however, is a defend base/harvest/kill everyone style of play. The difference comes in pursuing new technology, which is not parceled out chapter by chapter as in the solo missions but is more like a tech tree. The mothership can also move and hyperjump around the map. The MissionMan mission editing software is mind-bendingly complex, but also very powerful.

Homeworld's greatest obstacle to best-seller status will be proving to people that it doesn't have a steep learning curve despite how complex the controls and presentational seem at first glance. A very thorough tutorial, excellent documentation, and a clear key card make it easy to begin playing. Once you know the controls, it's no more difficult to manage than *StarCraft* or *Command & Conquer*, and the rewards are many. This is an utterly unique and completely satisfying game experience that is destined to become a classic. There is no question that *Homeworld* will be seen as a turning point: the historic site at which real-time strategy entered the next dimension.

T. Liam McDonald

Interceptors are the fast, plentiful first line of defense, doing all the nasty work and swarming the enemy.

A zoomed out view of... spermatozoa? No, those are the trails left by ships, which helps tell heading. Each side has a different color

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

93%

HIGHS: Slick, innovative design; unlimited cinematic views; strong multiplayer support.

LOWS: Solo play time can be very short.

BOTTOM LINE: Engrossing real-time strategy matched to a vital and visually intense story make this a gaming experience like none other.

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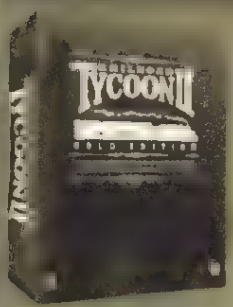

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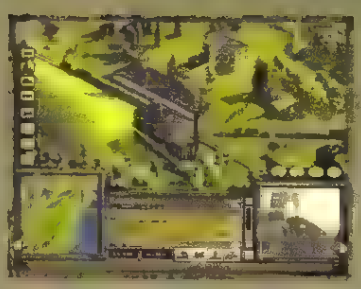


Panzer General 3D Assault

CATEGORY Turn-based strategy DEVELOPER Strategic Simulations Inc. PUBLISHER SSI, (408) 737-6800, *www.ssionline.com* REQUIRED Pentium 233, 64MB RAM, 275MB hard-drive space, 8X CD-ROM, 8 MB 3D card WE RECOMMEND Pentium 300, 16X CD-ROM MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS TCP/IP, Free Internet play, Maximum players 4

A turn-based classic rendered in 3D? It's a novel idea that really enhances the *Panzer General* experience.

I'm old enough to remember when the first "3-D" movies came out: all us kids thought they were so cool we didn't even mind wearing those goofy, uncomfortable cardboard glasses so we could see lions jumping off the screen, boulders crashing into our laps, or guns aiming straight at our noses.

My first response, upon seeing the new 3D *Panzer General*, was to reach for a pair of those glasses.

Since "3D" is the main selling point for this product (which may be the first turn-based wargame ever fully rendered that way), let's deal with that aspect first. On the plus side, some of the effects are remarkable. Water looks wet, hills have palpable mass, valleys enclose you when you maneuver through them, and aircraft dogfight in what appears to be real volumetric space. The trade-off for these effects: everything except the unit icons themselves is blurred. At first, this gave me a shrieking headache, as my eyes instinctively struggled to refocus. One quickly gets used to it, though, and there's no question that "taking the high ground" becomes a literal proposition.

Fortunately, the tactical view can be rotated 360 degrees – and you'll be doing that a lot, since the very depth of the images often masks some necessary visual information. Airplanes obscure ground units, elevations can hide roads and objectives, positioning AA guns within range of enemy bombers is always tricky, etc. In short, the graphics are a mixed blessing.

There's been a major overhaul of the classic *Panzer General* engine, too. Here again, I suspect opinions will be strongly divided. Some players will regard these changes as revolutionary enhancements; others will find them merely fussy and arbitrary. They certainly make a big difference in how the game feels and plays. I finally came to appreciate the cleverness and balance of these elements, but it took several days to become comfortable with them.

Be careful when positioning your AA guns — rotating the view can be very helpful.

For a refreshingly different experience, select one of the less-famous commanders; Kesselring provides the greatest challenge of the bunch.

The biggest change is the scrapping of the venerable "prestige point" system for upgrading units and equipment in a campaign. Instead, there's a three-tiered arrangement of "stars, slots, and promotions." Here's how it works: each leader can perform X number of actions per turn (with "X" being equal to that leader's number of "stars"). The more actions a commander can perform, the more effective will be the unit he commands. Units commanded by one to four star leaders occupy one abstract "slot" in the roster of available units. When a leader is promoted to five stars, his unit occupies two slots; eight stars equals three slots.

Between battles, you can swap leaders from active duty to the officer pool. Victories bring promotions, which you can distribute as you see fit (being able to promote a leader on the spot, if he achieves a really slick maneuver, is a nice emotional touch). What this all boils down to is the option to deploy a small number of extra-potent units, or a larger number of mediocre units, depending on your planned strategy. In the aggregate, all the features of the Army Management screen give you much

The game's 3D engine really shines when depicting the aerial action.

more control over your resources than was the case in all previous PG games.

Those extra promotion stars come in very handy in combat. Some of them are logical and some are fairly esoteric (tank units gain "overrun" bonuses, recon units acquire "long-range patrol" ability, aircraft become deadlier with "dive-bombing accuracy," etc.). There are about 50 of these features, and skillful use of them can make all the difference. But until you become familiar with them, you'll spend an ungodly amount of time flipping through the manual.

Stand-alone scenarios cover the old, familiar list of the Western Front's Greatest Hits. If you're new to the Panzer General series, you'll enjoy them, but if you're already familiar with the earlier games, they are a been there-done that experience. Multiplay is a blast, but solo play is also very gratifying because the AI is aggressive, sneaky, and surprisingly dynamic.

The campaigns have been revised greatly. You can play long ones as a famous leader (Rommel, Montgomery, Patton, Guderian), or shorter, rather more interesting campaigns as Kesselring, O'Connell, Leclerc, or even General Patch. I recommend the shorter ones: the battles are less familiar and you have a fair chance of winning on the default level of difficulty. As for the long campaigns, they are much more tweakable than ever before. In all previous editions, it was infuriatingly hard to score a "major victory." The system was rigged so that you always seemed to be a unit short or one turn too late, even if you'd torn the enemy to pieces. *Panzer General 3D Assault* gives you a very generous menu of campaign set up options, enabling you to balance the odds to match your preferred style of play. These are also extremely useful for handicapping multiplayer games.

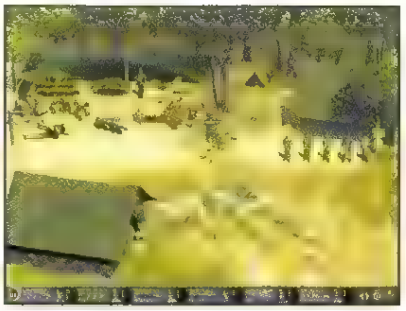
There are a few rough edges. Occasionally, the transitional videoes don't match the actual progression of battles (after conquering France as Rommel, the narrator jumps ahead to D-Day even though the campaign itself segues into Greece or North Africa). The Primary Objectives listed in pre-battle briefings do not always match the Primary Objectives shown on the map (when in doubt, use the map as your guide). The most irritating change, I think, is that the symbols on the strategic map no longer indicate which units have moved and which have not, forcing you to waste time by checking each unit's individual status on the roster. On the other hand, the game is exceptionally stable; in approximately 50 hours of intense play, I encountered only one crash — but since the game automatically saves at the end of each turn, even that was not a major problem.

A major part of *Panzer General's* original success was due to the cunning balance between historical plausibility and its addictive, intuitive interface. I think *3D Assault* errs just a bit on the side of Wargaming Lite, but the numerous customization features give it a fine-grained sophistication that amply compensates.

Even with out-of-focus graphics and a much steeper learning curve, this much revised sequel is certainly a worthy addition to the *Panzer General* heritage. Some of the new features are sure to be controversial, but at least they are creative and significant, and not just cosmetic.

On balance, *3D Assault's* virtues outweigh its quirks. I did not care for it until I'd struggled with it for a couple of days, but after I learned to accept it on its own terms, I found it refreshingly different and every bit as addictive as its illustrious predecessors.

—William R. Trotter



When in doubt, let the "auto-builder" optimize your roster of units.

Veteran Orders

Panzer General 3D's 44 tactical "extras" (called "Veteran Orders") are fascinating to work with. Some of the more powerful ones become available only at advanced promotion levels; others are common. Here's a list of the basic ones I found most useful:

• **CAMOUFLAGE** (all unit classes): Unit is harder for enemy to see, especially from the air; if enemy aircraft are nearby, use this order instead of "entrench" (if you can only use one of the two).

• **AMBUSH** (mainly armor and artillery): A defensive order that gives you a potent "first blow" advantage if enemy units blunder into range.

• **PROBE ATTACK** (recon units): Increases enemy unit suppression for one turn; very useful to set up a combined arms attack on strongpoints.

• **GROUND ATTACK** (anti-aircraft units): Enables flak guns to engage ground targets; very effective for the German 88s and the Allied 40mm batteries.

• **EAGLE-EYE** (fighters): Doubles a pilot's spotting range, enabling him to avoid flak-traps and/or perform valuable recon duty before committing to an attack.

• **FLY IN THE CLOUDS** (bombers): Renders a bomber unit undetectable unless enemy fighters are actually adjacent.

• **HULL-DOWN** (tanks): Makes tanks harder to spot and kill; improves their aim in both defensive and offensive roles.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

80%

HIGHS: Nicely tweaked command structure; impressive 3D graphics.

LOWS: Some blurriness; some design changes may seem fussy.

BOTTOM LINE: Try the demo before you invest in the full game; some of the changes are bound to be very divisive.

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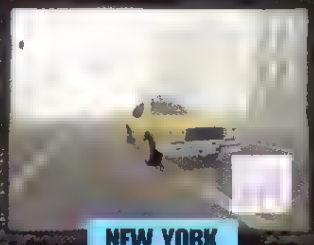

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Prince of Persia 3D

CATEGORY Action Adventure DEVELOPER Red Orb PUBLISHER Mindscape 800 601-7529 www.mindscape.com REQUIRED Pentium 233 MHz 64MB RAM 300MB hard drive space, 8MB 3D Hardware accelerator, DirectX compatible sound card or better WE RECOMMEND Pentium 300MHz MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS None

One of PC gaming's most acrobatic heroes returns in full 3D for a tenth-anniversary tour — but this latest installment doesn't have the luster of the original.

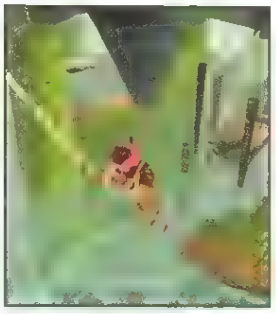
When gamers first beheld the original *Prince of Persia* 10 years ago, they were astounded to see the most fluid, lifelike animations ever to grace a PC game. The story wasn't exactly original — it was basically *Arabian Nights* — and the 2D running, jumping, and climbing had been seen in plenty of games before this one. But the animation was so darn realistic and the graphics so much better than anything done before that it just didn't matter. *Prince of Persia* was arguably the first hint at the sort of animation magic the right person — in this case, the now legendary Jordan Mechner — could squeeze out of the computers of that era, and proved that the PC was truly a legitimate platform for first-rate arcade gaming.

A sequel in 1993 added SVGA graphics and backgrounds that created a pseudo-3D depth of field, but the action was still essentially 2D. Now, a decade after he hit the PC gaming scene, the Prince steps boldly into the world of 3D graphics — and while the action, story, and puzzles are solidly enjoyable, the latest version doesn't quite have the full dramatic luster of the original. Part of the reason is that the past couple of years have seen a slew of good games that revolve around the same sort of acrobatics featured here; another is the technical glitches.

The story this time still has plenty of that *Arabian Nights* flair: the Sultan has been tricked into promising his daughter's hand in marriage to the son of his Vizier, who for some reason is now a Kilrathi-like tiger man. Since the princess is *already* married to our hero, the Vizier frames him for murder and tosses him into a dungeon, just like the first two games, you've got to find a way out of your cell, save the Princess from a couple of close calls, and kill the cat guy to save the day.

Prince of Persia might be his title, but our hero looks more like a samurai these days as he wields his deadly blade, decapitating enemies and running them through with reverse thrusts that would make any warrior proud. He also gets to use a pike, double blades, and a bow and arrow, the last being crucial for solving certain puzzles. There's no spurting blood, and combat is pretty rudimentary, but it's surprisingly fun; it's certainly much better than the lame sword fighting sequences of the first two games.

Unlike the first two instalments



Using ropes to swing from one spot to another is fun, but it'll take you a few attempts before you figure it out

Level design is super throughout the game, and nowhere is more visually impressive than in the levels where you must climb to the top of an ancient dirigible

The low side angle used for combat seems disappointing at first, but in fact it's probably the best perspective for this style of fighting.

Prince3D takes you away from the Sultan's city to new vistas, using a *Tomb Raider*-style perspective: a twelfth-century dirigible, snowy mountains, and a couple of very eerie temples, many filled with huge machines made up of gigantic cogs, wheels, and gears. The level design is excellent throughout, and it's probably the game's strongest suit because it's here that the biggest benefits are reaped by the move to 3D. Besides dealing with all the usual traps (pressure plates, floor spikes, crumbling walkways, guillotines, and so on) you've also got to master new techniques such as swimming and swinging on ropes. Still, the gameplay emphasis remains squarely on the big three: running, jumping, and climbing. And while there's definitely much fun to be had just doing that, *Prince3D* can be maddeningly frustrating at times.

Take the insanely long load times: on a 450MHz Celeron with 128MB of RAM, it takes nearly *two minutes* from the time you launch the game until you finally start playing (quick loads within levels are almost instantaneous, however). While the Prince has never been a speedster, constant animation slowdowns make it look as though he's moving underwater (and I'm *not* referring to the swimming scenes). A combat glitch causes the Prince to tuck his weapon away whenever he changes planes — by stepping onto stairs, walking up or down ramps, or jumping from a small ledge — and you'll frequently get sliced and diced as you struggle to re-arm him. Add in a few random crashes, and it's easy to see how your enthusiasm can start to wane.

These aren't fatal flaws, but they do keep a very good game from being a great game. Even so, action fans will definitely get their money's worth — as long as they're not expecting this game to shake up the genre.

Stephen Poole

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

70%

HIGHS: Great graphics and level design; fun combat and acrobatics.

LOWS: Long load times; annoying glitches; animation slowdowns; occasional crashes.

BOTTOM LINE: Not the groundbreaker that the first *Prince of Persia* was, but still good fun.

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NBA Inside Drive 2000

CATEGORY Sports DEVELOPER: Microsoft PUBLISHER: Microsoft, 800-426-9400, *www.microsoft.com* REQUIRED Pentium II 166, 32MB RAM 2MB local-bus video card and sound card, 90MB minimum hard drive space, 6X CD-ROM drive WE RECOMMEND Pentium II 350, 64MB RAM, 8MB 3D accelerator card, 16X CD-ROM drive, Gamepad, 325MB hard-drive space MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS Competitive or cooperative two-player hotseat

Microsoft dropped the ball with its last NBA effort, but recovers nicely with this solid action-based sequel.

Up here in Vancouver, we've got this eloquent adage about our hometown NBA team, the Grizzlies. I can't remember the exact phraseology, but I do know it contains the words "they" and "suck" and is often interspersed with a string of profanities.

Fortunately, down hearted hardcourt fans of any geographical location have always been able to turn to EA Sports' powerhouse NBA Live series to escape bitter reality at least momentarily. Now Microsoft is re-entering this surprisingly sparse genre with its second whirl at B-ball, *NBA Inside Drive 2000*.

Leagues ahead of its lame 1997 effort *NBA Full Court Press*, *Inside Drive* is spirited, entertaining and, at $19.95, certainly a good value. It isn't as "big" as the EA game, doesn't sport the same sort of ambient flair, and is geared toward action over simulation. But it's a heck of a lot of fun if not taken too seriously, and should make a fine stomping ground for PC basketball newbies.

You may not be able to play all that effectively from this tight camera position, but you *can* check out all those wonderful animations courtesy of Microsoft.

More than anything else, *Inside Drive* is an exercise in dexterity and reflexes. Players blaze about the court at world-class sprinter speed and ask that your fingers do the same on the gamepad. And, should you elect to go for "advanced" controls in the key areas of shooting, blocking, rebounding, and strafing, get ready to exercise your digits 'til they beg for mercy.

Now, don't get me wrong—this isn't a total arcade samfest. The game lets you institute pre-set plays (though you can't create your own), customize virtually any facet of the rules, alter rosters and make trades, and choose between automatic. And though an abnormal emphasis is placed on hot streaks, *Inside Drive* most often impressively matches real-life player abilities with that of their digital peers.

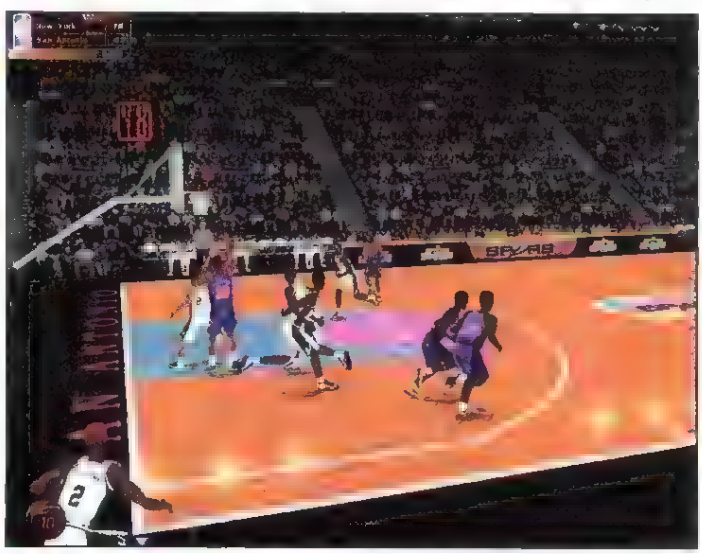
Shooting in particular, where a vast array of jumpers and dunks and bank shots are at your disposal, is totally convincing, as is the final-minute drill where trailing AI teams commit intentional fouls, attempt long throw-ins, and reel off distant three pointers. Defenses are unbelievably weak, and 170-plus point totals are not uncommon, but that's what an arcade approach and buzzsaw gameplay speed are expected to do.

Visually, *Inside Drive* rocks. The overall presentation is slick, with plenty of mid- and post-game stats and diagrams, auto-replays of memorable baskets, and a great look and feel to free throw routines. Each arena is unique and filled with appropriate logos, colors, and a beautiful hardwood floor complete with reflections and lighting effects. But it's in the rendering and animations of the actual players that the game really excels. In a word, *Inside Drive* players look *believable*, especially at the game's ultra-high 1024x768 resolution, where their slightly angular but admirably complex bodies really shine. With or without the ball, during the action and even after a whistle, they'll jump and dive and act and react with a symphony of twists and turns and dribbles eerily reminiscent of the real thing.

The game's audio section, meanwhile, is a beautiful cacophony of ball bounces, backboard wall ops, rimshots, and shoe squeaks. I didn't hear any trash talking, but the play by play of Seattle Sonics broadcaster Kevin Calabro and color commentary of Marques Johnson is perhaps unparalleled in PC sports. Sure, there's the odd inaccuracy, but these verbal veterans most often get it right with a dash of panache, tons of good humor, and even the odd interruption or slip-up for a truly improvisational feel. *Very* nice.

A little less nice is the game's preclusion of several seemingly essential features. The fast gameplay speed, for instance, can't be adjusted. Nor can you modify a season's length, restart or save a game once it has begun, conduct a full career, or play over a LAN or the Internet. And nowhere is Microsoft's "budget" philosophy more evident than in the nonexistent championship celebratory sequence. But if it's attitude you want, *Inside Drive* usually delivers. This is basketball with an accent on immediate fun.

Gordon Goble



Crowds don't move but are attractive, while the lighting effects, shadows, and reflections on the hardwood floors in the Alamo Dome bring the game to life

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

76%

HIGHS: Gorgeous player art and animations; good audio effects; affordable price.

LOWS: Unrealistic pace to gameplay; virtually no defense; no career mode or network play.

BOTTOM LINE: A solid and inexpensive action-based alternative to *NBA Live 2000*.

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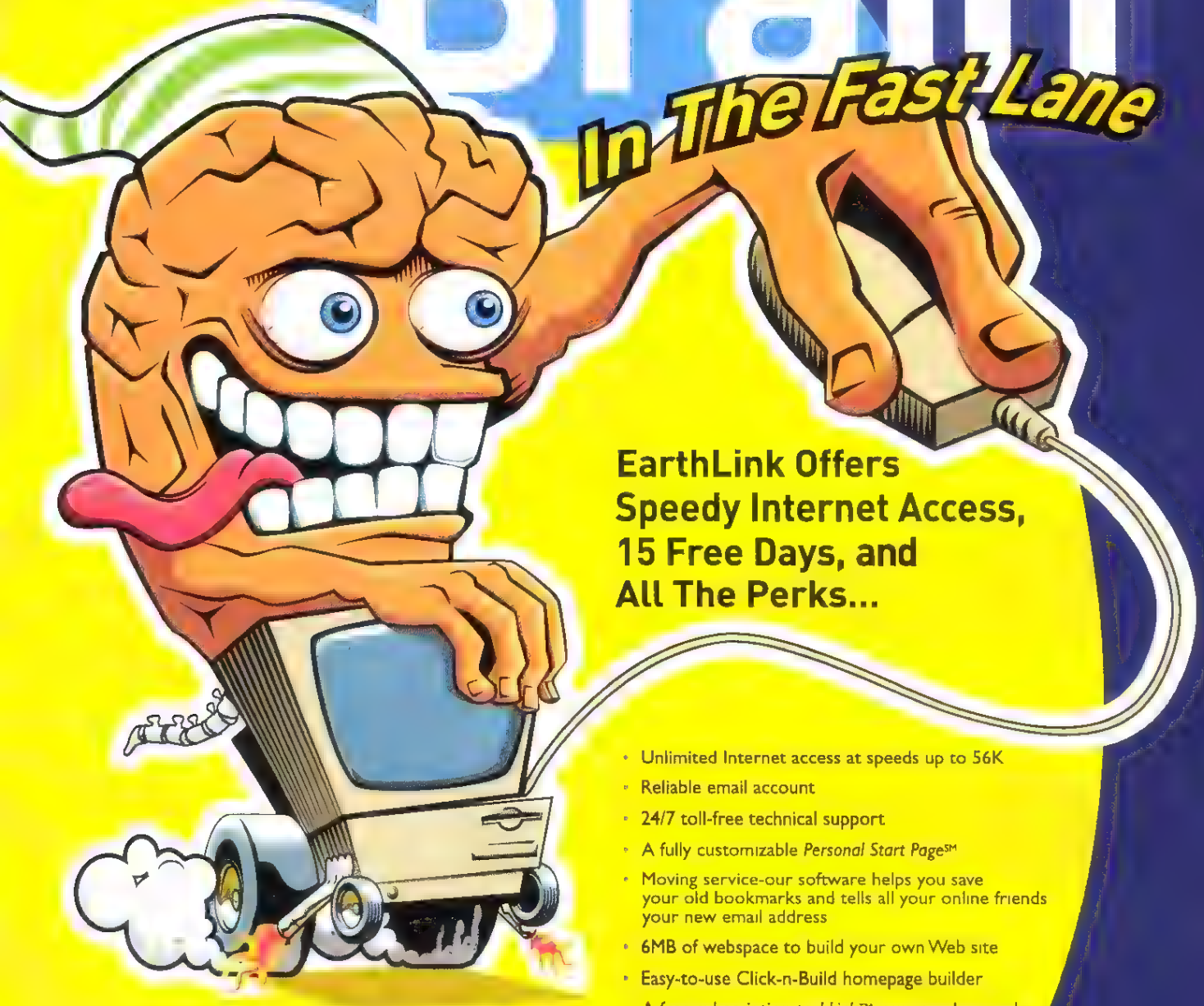

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ōdi·um

n. def. - hate coupled with disgust

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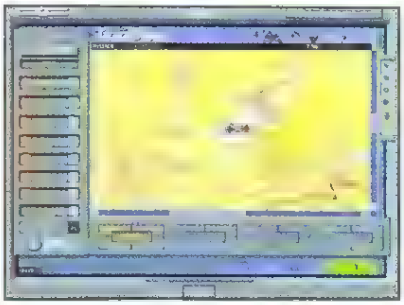
Jane's USAF

CATEGORY: Flight sim DEVELOPER: Pixel Multimedia PUBLISHER: Jane's Combat Simulations, (800) 245-4525, *www.janes.ea.com* REQUIRED: Pentium 233, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 600MB hard drive space, Windows compatible sound card WE RECOMMEND: Pentium 450, 64MB RAM, 3Dfx card, 1.5GB hard drive space Joystick, Throttle, Rudders MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS: Serial, Modem, IPX, TCP/IP Maximum players 16

The sim world welcomes the successor to *ATF* and *US Navy Fighters*, and the heart of the forthcoming *Jane's World War*.

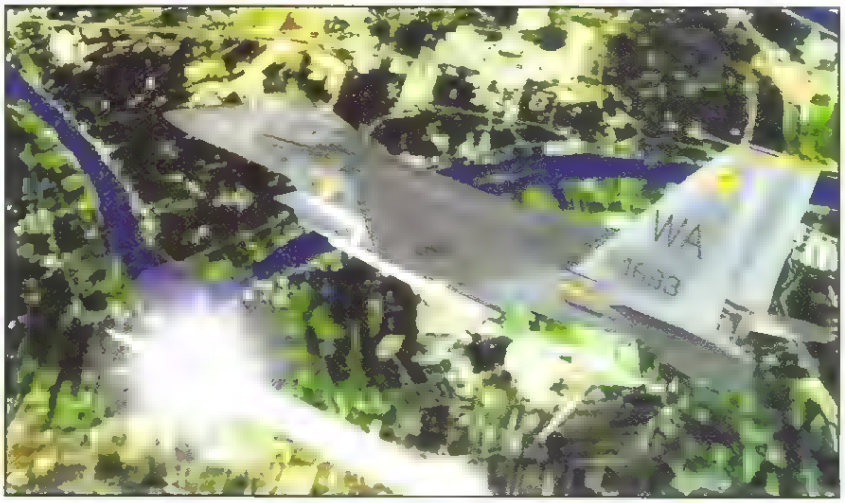
Jane's USAF continues a fine tradition begun with the legendary Chuck Yeagar sims and continued over the years through *US Navy Fighters*, *Advanced Tactical Fighters*, *IAF*, and *WWII Fighters*. That tradition is one of quick action survey sims with a hint of realism and plenty of configuration and mission creation options. Survey sims (those simulating several different aircraft) are not, by their very nature, very detailed. The hardcore crowd tends to avoid them in favor of more detailed and accurate fare such as *Flanker 2.0* and *F-15*. By being sim snobs, they're just missing out on some great gaming.

There are no real surprises in *USAF*. It is a next-generation Jane's/EA survey sim, and in many ways the most wide ranging yet. Israeli developer Pixel Multimedia (the outfit behind *IAF*) has followed and expanded upon the central appeal of this line: plenty of planes, several geographical regions, limitless instant-combat possibilities, shared controls, and tightly scripted campaigns. Variety, and plenty of it, is the key to its appeal. The heart of the game is the quick combat mode. In quick combat, you use a simple interface to select your plane type and wingmen, select enemies and ground targets, give yourself a loadout, altitude and theater of operations, and just get in and fly. It takes about a minute to create a custom flight experience of any stripe: F-117 with escort versus MiGs; four Phantoms against one F-16 (guns only); night time F-15 bombing run with two wings of F-22s opposing; and on and on. There are no long transit times (unless you want them), you can select the precise level of threat you want (but not the specifics of location and degree), and any advantage or disadvantage you'd care to start with.



The dynamic tactical display map is exceptionally well done. You can view the moving map while in transit and get continual updates on the unfolding situation

Of course, a good sim needs a solid campaign and some scripted missions and *USAF* offers both. There are four semi-dynamic campaigns, each with structured missions and variable assets depending upon performance. Use too many AIM-120s, and you may run out



Terrain looks decent at altitude, but down in the mud, it tends to strobe oddly.

DIFFERENT ERAS, DIFFERENT PLANES

VIETNAM

Lose too many wingmen, and you could find yourself flying solo on the next hop. Matched to a diverse set of tightly crafted missions, the game provides as excellent a campaign system as you could ask for without creating a complete dynamic battlefield. The campaign offerings are a simulated training situation at Nellis Air Force Base, Vietnam War, Persian Gulf War, and a hypothetical Russian versus Alliance war in Europe. Direct multiplayer links (via IP address and LAN) are included for custom and pre-fab 16-person scenarios. Oddly, no Jane's Combat.net links are included in the front-end.

The eight flyable planes include the F-15, F-16, F-22, F-117, F-4, MiG-29, F-105 and A-10, plus some variants. Each has its own distinct cockpit look and some specific handling features unique to that model. Controls and systems are generic to the whole game, meaning the function of [illegible] weapons systems are the same from plane to plane. Some avionics function a bit better or worse than others, but then modeling the nuances of radar is not the prime goal of a survey sim.

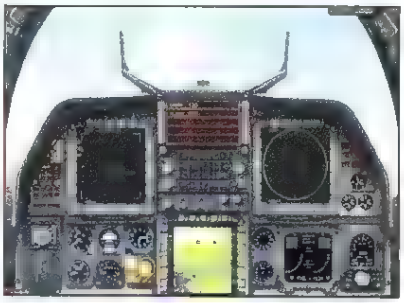
Variety, and plenty of it, is the key to its appeal. The heart of the game is the quick combat mode.

The look of each plane is quite nice, with lots of detail and surface animation. Explosions are good and fiery, with plenty of metal spinning through the air. The four theaters of war are mapped in fair detail, the objects and buildings look fine and are adequately integrated with the landscape. The elevation handling is also fairly effective, with some sharp changes handled pretty well. I started to encounter some issues with the terrain at low altitudes, however. The textures themselves look good, but the way they processed was flaky. I noticed it first in Germany, probably because the greens and browns of the texture maps had more contrast and showed the problems more clearly.

For starters, I can see all the seams. Maybe this struck my eye more since I had just spent hours with the flawless landscape of *Flight Unlimited III*, but the terrain looked like a checkered quilt. It got worse, particularly in exterior views where I could see the terrain textures shift. I ran the game on a custom made PIII-450 with 128MB RAM, an ATI Expression main video card, and a standard Monster II accelerator. As I flew over the terrain, I could see the textures smoothing piece by piece, and see the close textures almost strobing at times. The effect wasn't too bad in the desert regions, but Europe looked funky in the extreme. Added to the problem was the poor handling of minor terrain objects like rocks and bushes. Down low in the A-10, I often saw rocks floating in the desert air. At 400 feet over Europe, the little orange and green bushes (which seem wildly out of place and out of scale on the terrain map) blinked like Christmas lights.

Of course, outside of the A-10, few planes get low enough for these terrain issues to have a serious impact. The balance of the sim measures up to the high quality we've come to expect from Jane's. Since it will be the basis of the action in the highly anticipated *Jane's World War*, we'll likely be playing this one for some time to come.

Chet Thomas



Cockpits are unique from plane to plane, but with none of the detail or functionality of a single plane sim like *Falcon*.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

85%

HIGHS: Wide variety of planes and theaters; excellent quick mission options.

LOWS: Some shaky terrain behavior; medium realism in flight and avionics.

BOTTOM LINE: This one will appeal to everyone but the extreme hardcore crowd.

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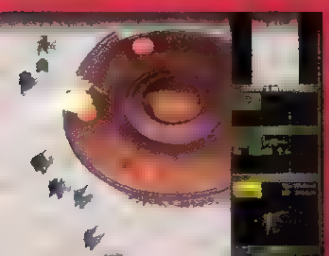

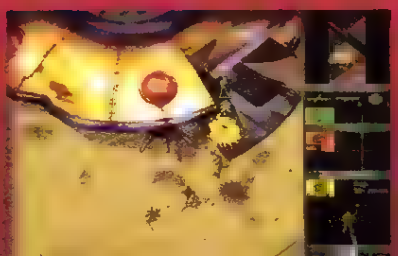

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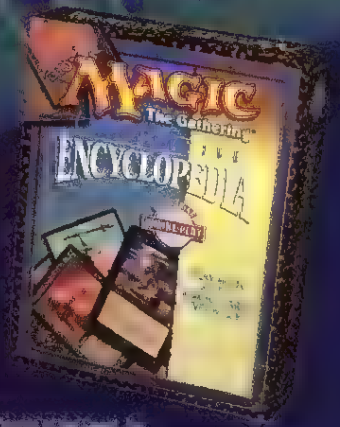

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NASCAR Racing 3

CATEGORY Racing DEVELOPER Papyrus Design Group PUBLISHER Sierra Sports (800) 757-7707, *www.sierrasports.com* REQUIRED P166, 32MB RAM, 80MB HD space, SVGA 800x600 w/64k colors WE RECOMMEND PII 300, 64MB RAM, 255MB HD space, Glide or D3D supported accelerator card, A3D 2.0 or DirectSound3D supported sound card, Joystick or steering wheel MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS IPX, TCP/IP, Free Internet play on WON.NET, Maximum players: 32

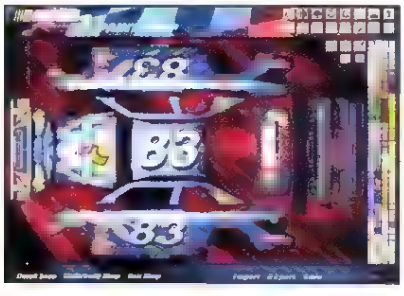
Sierra stays on a proven track for its third lap around the well-worn NASCAR circuit.

If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

This is the time-tested philosophy adhered to in the latest edition of the NASCAR Racing series from Papyrus and Sierra Sports. By choosing not to incorporate the hyper realistic physics model from last year's *Grand Prix Legends* sim into this third generation NASCAR game, the design team at Papyrus has effectively checked their bets and decided not raise the stakes until some better cards hit the table.

Better 3D cards, that is. Purportedly, those better cards will translate into faster hardware specs for Papyrus' core audience, guaranteeing systems that can comfortably handle the CPU-intensive demands of 43 NASCAR machines individually tuned to the high fidelity *GPL* physics engine. Cynics might suggest that the poor sales figures for *GPL* were all the reason that parent company Sierra needed to jump in and de-tune this highly anticipated new version of its flagship racing game.

Whatever the reasons are, we consumers have little choice but to play the cards we're dealt and, with *NASCAR Racing 3*, we've still been dealt a pretty strong hand. Although the new title only offers a mildly tweaked update to the aging *NASCAR 2* physics engine, it also delivers a significant graphics overhaul, superb new 3D sound effects, some long overdue force feedback support, and free Internet play. While none of these enhancements can be consid-



The car setup screen has been supplemented with new sway bar adjustment and grille taping options (for decreasing drag at the expense of engine cooling).

To hell with Formula One. For close-quarters competition out there on the race track, there is still nothing that compares with good ol' American NASCAR racing.

ered very bleeding edge in today's highly competitive racing sim genre, they do breathe quite a bit of new life into the five-year-old franchise.

NASCAR Racing 3 maintains its predecessors' reputation as the finest American stock car simulators on the market. The new game boasts 45 licensed cars and drivers as well as 28 real-life tracks culled from the Winston Cup and Busch Grand National series. Although this represents a reduction on the whopping 35 circuits offered in *NASCAR Racing, 1999 Edition* (and the elimination of the Craftsman Truck class), it is still quite a healthy number of venues to digest. Perhaps in an effort to soothe the frustration felt by hardcore fans over the absence of Daytona in the game (Sega still holds exclusive rights to the speedway), Papyrus has gone out and secured the rights to the legendary Brickyard at Indianapolis in *NASCAR 3*. The level of detail that has gone into rendering this storied facility is nothing short of amazing, everything from the new pagoda structure behind the pits to the individual rumble strips on the corner apexes has been reproduced with remarkable authenticity.

In fact, all of the tracks have been given a healthy boost in the graphics department. Apart from the greater sense of clarity the game's new high-resolution 800x600 and 1024x768 Glide and Direct3D-fueled screens provide, each track now boasts a shaded racing

The level of detail that has gone into each car's livery is as painstaking as ever — Papyrus really delivers.

groove as well as dynamic skid marks that persist on the paved surface throughout each session. Additionally, the game features some marvelous new transparent smoke and dust effects, animated flaggers, and flashing yellow caution lights around each of the circuits. Taken collectively, these visual enhancements may help to bring the sim into the late 1990s but still come up short when compared to the superb real-time lighting effects employed in Ubi Soft's *Monaco Grand Prix Racing Simulation 2* or the awesome 3D cockpit and animated suspension effects in Papyrus' own *Grand Prix Legends*.

The game's audio is another story altogether. Papyrus has incorporated a powerful new 3D sound engine in *NASCAR 3*, and the remarkable posi-

"I WANT MY SHORT TRACKS BACK!"

1

2

3

4

FIGURE 1

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FIGURE 2

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34 12 99 0 0 XXXXXXXX
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tional audio effects that result are nothing short of amazing. If you own a 3D sound card that supports A3D 2.0 or DirectSound 3D, you'll be able to hear the deeply resonant engine note of other cars as they close on your left rear quarter panel or alternatively fade off into the distance. And if you're fortunate enough to have a surround-sound setup with a sub woofer attached, then you can expect to experience the most explosive audio environment ever created for a racing sim.

But what of the game's aging *NASCAR 2* physics engine? Well, the driving model employed in *NASCAR 3* may no longer be able to claim bragging rights as the standard by which all other sims are measured, but it still offers a healthy challenge for rookie and veteran sim racers alike. Although brake lock-ups and high-speed wheelspin aren't modeled, the remarkable sensitivity each vehicle displays to the subtlest of setup changes in the game's full featured garage menu is still quite impressive. Papyrus has also added adjustments for front and rear sway bars and grille taping to this release (the latter improves straightline speed at the expense of engine cooling). Hardcore gamers who have been spoiled by *Grand Prix Legends*' superb driving model won't find a lot to crow about here, but the comfortable familiarity of the sim should find favor with the legions of NASCAR fans who prefer bumper-to-bumper driveability over astonishingly realistic physics.

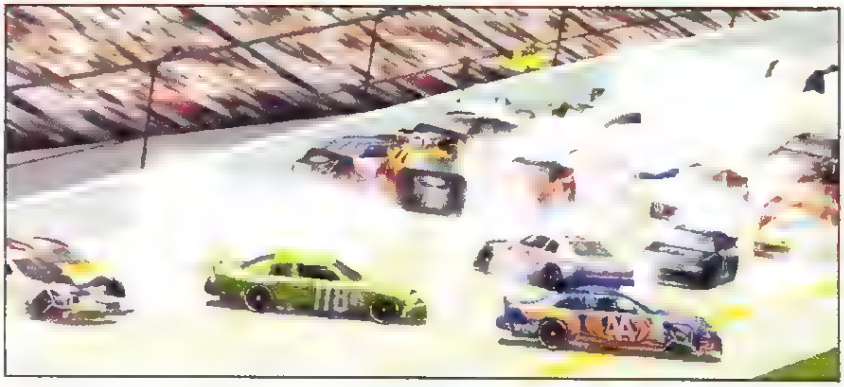
Papyrus sims have always excelled in the AI department, and this trend continues with *NASCAR 3*. Unfortunately, a serious bug has been carried over from earlier versions: the AI drivers will queue up behind any car that has come to a halt on the racing line, resulting in a massive traffic jam of stationary vehicles. Although they've had five years to fix this ludicrous problem, Papyrus has curiously been either unwilling or unable to do so.

Cynics might suggest that the poor sales figures for Grand Prix Legends were all the reason that parent company Sierra needed to jump in and de-tune this highly anticipated new version of its flagship racing game.

One of the more exciting developments with *NASCAR 3* is the free Internet play offered on Sierra's dedicated WON.NET matchmaking service. Gamers seeking human competition will no longer have to fork out monthly payments to the now defunct TEN pay site for their online fix, as 32 players can now compete for free on the track of their choice with just a couple of mouse clicks. I experienced a significant amount of warping with my 56K dial up connection during several hours of online play, but on a DSL or cable connection, you'll have a riotously good time.

Had Papyrus been able to implement a more user-friendly version of its next-generation *GPL* physics engine into *NASCAR 3*, the entire franchise would likely have jumped out into an unassailable lead over the rest of the sim racing pack. As it is, they are still very much in the race — but the competition is actually beginning to edge ahead of them.

—Andy Mahood



The crash effects aren't up to *Grand Prix Legends* standards, but they're still awfully impressive.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

81%

HIGHS: High-resolution graphics; improved AI; superb 3D sound; force-feedback support.

LOWS: Aging physics engine; 20 percent fewer tracks than before; significant AI bug.

BOTTOM LINE: A satisfying sim that's only missing the *Grand Prix Legends* engine.

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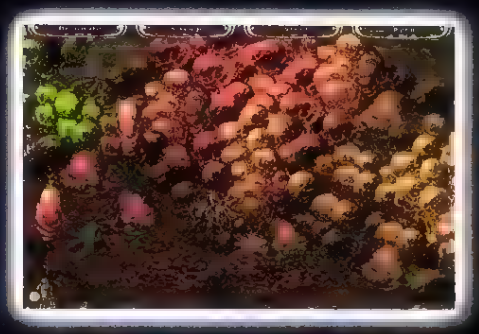

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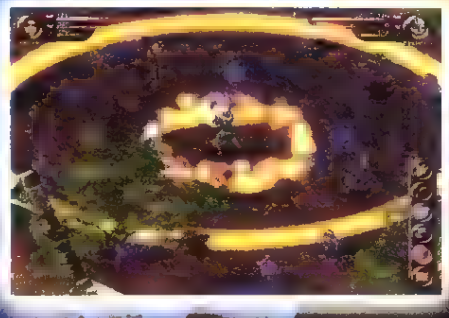

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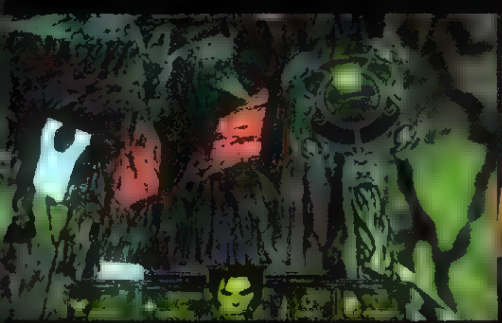

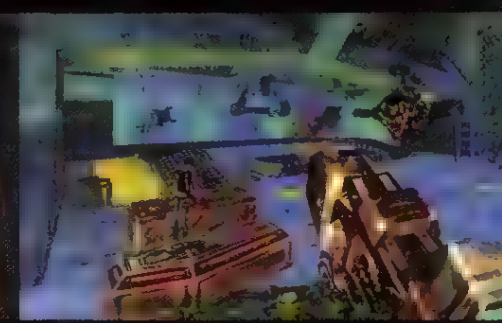

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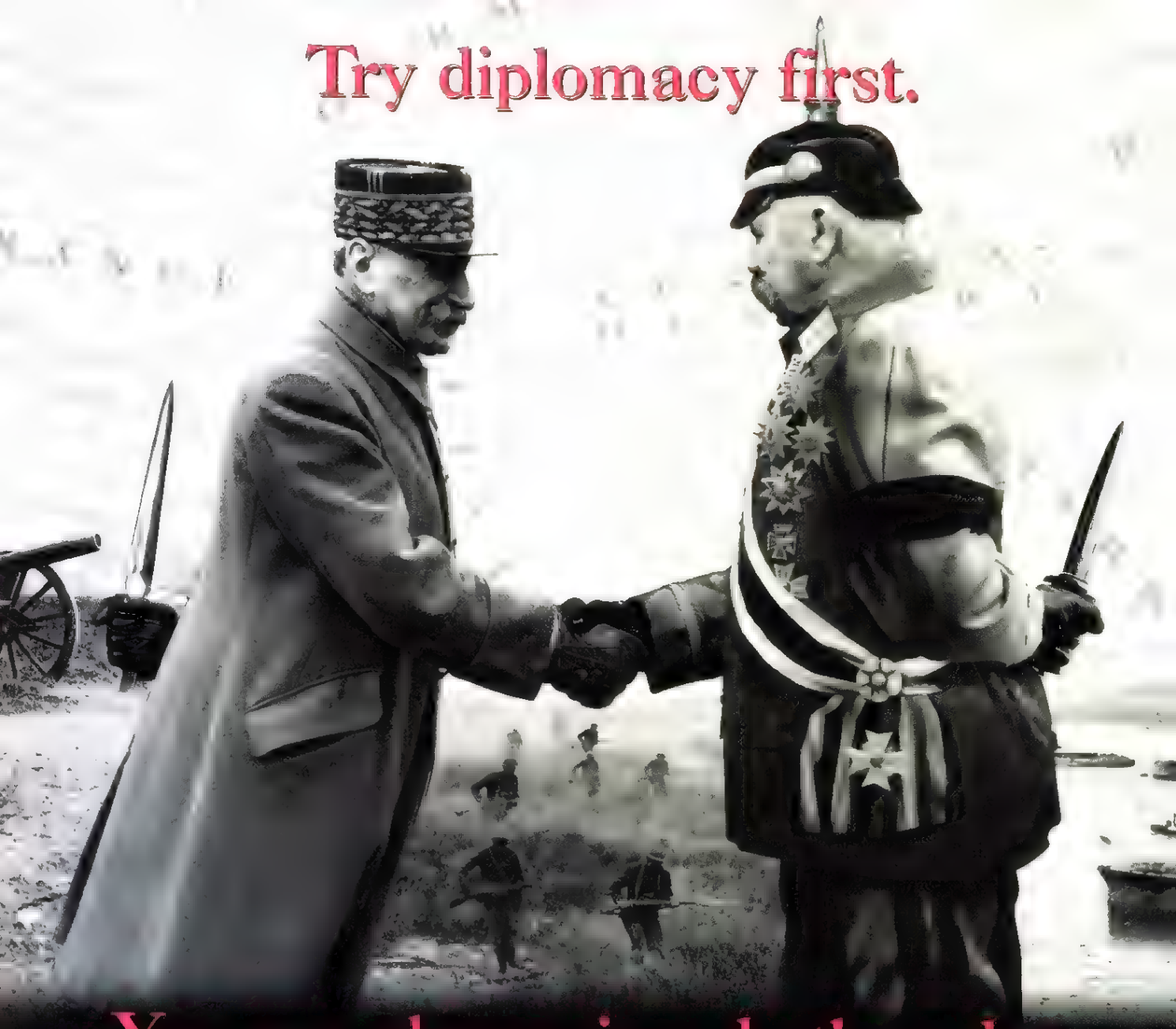
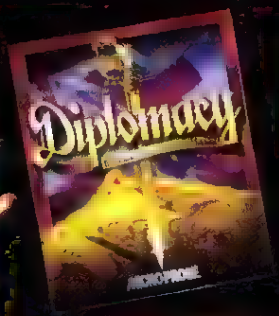


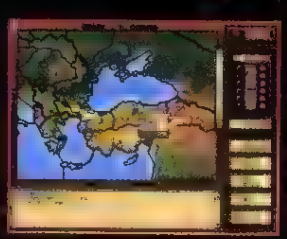
You can always invade them later.

AVALON HILL'S

Diplomacy



Bring out your inner dictator



May your wit be as sharp as your sword, because Avalon Hill's Diplomacy has captured the true spirit of the legendary board game. You'll start as one of the seven pre-WWI superpowers, England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Turkey, and Austria-Hungary. These political boundaries will become your prey as you negotiate your way to the top. Beg, threaten, plead and argue your way past nations where friends become pawns and enemies become allies. You'll have to be cunning. Smooth. And deceitful. This is a game that can't be left to chance.

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MiG Alley

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY: Flight Sim DEVELOPER: Rowan Software PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive, (415) 439-4854, *www.empire-us.com*
REQUIRED: Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 6X CD-ROM drive, 400MB minimum hard-drive space, 800x600 video with 16-bit colors
WE RECOMMEND: Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 12X CD-ROM drive, DirectX-supported D3D accelerator card with 16MB RAM, Joystick
MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS: Serial, Modem (28.8+), IPX, TCP/IP, Maximum players: 8

An oft-neglected part of air warfare's history receives an admirable treatment.

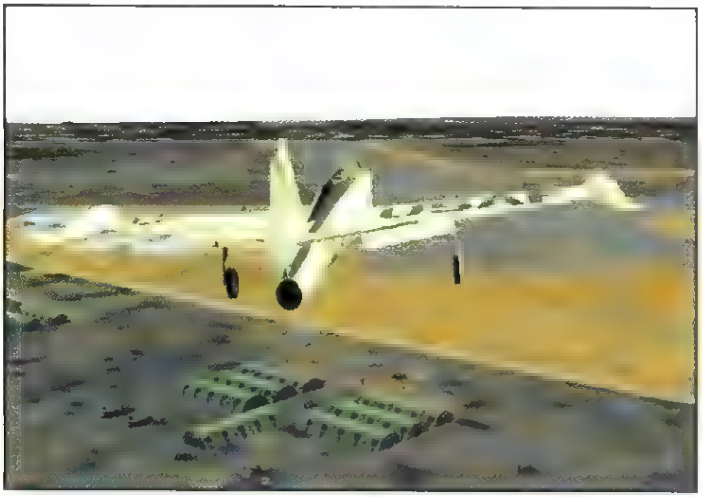
It took a while, but thanks to the fine folks at Rowan Software and Empire Interactive, we finally have a first-rate Korean War combat flight sim that can take its place alongside those great titles from Jane's and MicroProse that spoiled us rotten last year. *MiG Alley* is not only the best-handling and best-looking sim to hit the shelves this year, it's also the most immersive aerial combat game since *European Air War*.

Best known for its WWI *Flying Corps* titles, UK-based Rowan was also responsible for a largely unheralded Vietnam A-6 sim called *Flight of the Intruder* way back in 1990 (lousy movie but a great game). In *MiG Alley*, the programmers at Rowan have chosen to simulate the Korean War, another era of modern aerial warfare that not too many people know a lot about (outside of late night *M*A*S*H* reruns, that is).

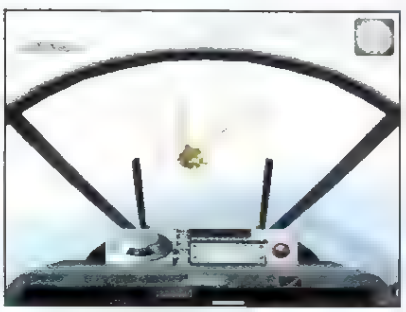
Although it's not the first sim to take a crack at this 1950s Cold War conflict (Virgin's arcade-style *Sabre Ace* comes to mind), *MiG Alley* is by far the most well-crafted. The opportunity to fly high-performance jets in an age before the advent of infra-red and radar-guided missiles turned the art of dogfighting into a high-tech videogame ought to appeal to just about any serious combat sim fan. When you combine this unique 500mph knife-fighting environment with some well-modeled vintage jet aircraft, smooth-as-butter 3D graphics, and a rich dynamic campaign structure, you have a game that truly sets a new high watermark for combat flight sims.

Whether you opt to log some flight time at the game's Hot Shot and Quick Mission screens or jump straight into a full campaign, you have the choice of four different planes to pilot on the USAF side (the F-51 Mustang, F-80C, F-84E and F-86 Sabre) and two on the Communist side (Yak-9 and MiG-15). The Red aircraft can't be selected during the campaign mode, but they can be flown in a number of the Quick Mission scenarios. These six planes (nine if you count the different model variants with the F-86 Sabre and MiG-15) offer more than enough variety to keep your appetite for variety satiated throughout the game. A comprehensive communications menu is also available for issuing commands to the game's well-behaved AI wingmen.

The high fidelity flight models employed in *MiG Alley* are remarkably well done. Although these subsonic post-WWII hot rods weren't the easiest planes to fly, Rowan has thoughtfully included plenty of detuning options to make them accessible to the NovaLogic crowd. Conversely, hardcore simmers will find plenty to keep them busy once they've completed their takeoff rolls with all of the realism settings cranked up. In addition to accurately modeled spins, accelerated stalls and aero/weight drag effects, the sim also tosses in flameouts, airframe stress and wind buffeting. The first time I crab-walked an F-86 into a crosswind land-



Accelerated graphics do a fantastic job rendering these highly authentic 1950s jets, as well as the expansive Korean Peninsula beneath.



The hot seat...get ready to handle your plane through all manner of stressful encounters

The art of close air support was elevated a notch in the jump from World War Two to Korea, and you get to see the progress up close.

ing with a bootful of opposite rudder, I realized I was flying a sim that would bite me very hard in the ass if I didn't give it my full attention. Waypoint navigation can be quite difficult because of the weak nav-aids offered, but everything else to do with the flight experience is absolutely top-notch.

MiG Alley's Direct3D enhanced graphics are equally impressive, and not because Rowan has raised the bar appreciably from the stunning visuals offered in *Falcon 4.0* or *Jane's WWII Fighters*. No, what truly amazed me about the game was how it was able to populate its attractive and lushly rendered terrain with huge waves of highly detailed and complex AI aircraft in resolutions as high as 1024x768, and yet never suffer a noticeable framerate hit (and we're talking upwards of 200 planes in the air at the same time here!). I was able to max out all of the graphic options on my PII 300/Voodoo 3 combo right

from the get-go, without ever sparing a second thought for jerky gameplay. Whatever trick Rowan is using to achieve this should be bottled up instantly and sold to some of its more bloated competitors.

The audio in the game is also highly accomplished. The engine sounds and explosion effects are quite convincing and the ear-splitting scream of another jet flying close by after a head-on pass is enough to make you jump right out of your seat. The radio chatter is also highly immersive, and if you fly close enough to the ground after strafing an enemy train or truck convoy you will even hear the Red troops swearing at you in what sounds like very angry Chinese!

Giving NovaLogic products a run for their money in the eye and ear candy department is one thing, but when you can also turn out a dynamic campaign

The first time I crab-walked an F-86 into a crosswind landing with a bootful of opposite rudder, I realized I was flying a sim that would bite me very hard in the ass if I didn't give it my full attention.

structure that rivals the heady stuff from Jane's and MicroProse, you are definitely doing something right. *MiG Alley* actually boasts five different campaigns that run the gamut from the initial North Korean invasion in 1950 to the Spring Offensive of 1951 (the last real chapter of a war that ended in a virtual stalemate in 1953). The first four mini campaigns aren't fully dynamic, but they do prepare the player for combat in each of the four different aircraft types. Once you get into the final stage you are presented with a fully dynamic campaign that easily rivals anything I've seen from the established heavyweights.

For this grand campaign, you are in command of 112 aircraft arranged into seven squadrons, which you must deploy three times per day in support of UN ground troops. Players can use the game's remarkably detailed planning screen to fine-tune individual

Detailed replay views let you examine the dogfighting from close angles, the better to help you analyze your air-to-air fighting skills (and also scope out the sweet visuals).

Ah, the good old P-51 Mustang. It served quite well in WWII, and still does the job.

sorties for up to 96 aircraft, or simply let the game generate frag orders automatically. Micro-management types will have a field day here as they can gleefully adjust waypoints, loadouts and targets for their massive armada of F-51s, F-80s, F-84s and F-86 Sabres. You can even initiate long-range ground strikes from a group of Japan-based B-26 and B-29 bomber squadrons. If you don't hit the right targets or suffer too many losses, the North Korean Army and Chinese troops will eventually march south of the 38th Parallel and kick your sorry ass all the way back to Kansas. One of the real beauties of the game's campaign structure is that, just as with the flight model, it is fully configurable to suit both casual and expert players. (Be sure to study the online manual for gameplay tips, because the printed manual is very weak at explaining many of the key game features!)

Despite the impressive set of features that *MiG Alley* brings to the party, the game still suffers in a few notable areas. Internet play, ostensibly supporting head-to-head and team play for up to eight players, is all but a pipe dream because of the game's poorly optimized multiplayer code. Also, there is an intermittent in-flight screen shuddering bug that has carried over from the UK release, which Rowan doesn't seem to have fully quashed yet (this was particularly evident when flying the MiG).

In the final analysis though, these are pretty trifling concerns when you examine the overall product that Rowan and Empire have brought to the market place. *MiG Alley* offers a gorgeously rendered treatment of six well-modeled Korean War aircraft with one of the most immersive dynamic campaign structures ever offered in a PC flight sim. What's more, you can fully tune the flight models, pilot aids and campaign difficulty to suit any skill level. Kudos Rowan, ya done good.

Andy Mahood

Notable Nose Art

MiG Alley will permit you to modify and import your own graphics into the game for use as nose art on each of the aircraft. Check the online manual for the full details on how this is done. Don't think that you're restricted to drawing some simple text entries and stick men, however. It only took me about 10 minutes with Corel Photo-Paint to paste this snappy-looking JPEG (which I had pulled off of *PC Gamer*'s site a few months back) into a graphic template file and then launch the 3D conversion program on the *MiG Alley* CD to make it accessible within the game. You can, of course, be far ruder than this if you think that something out of Playboy or Penthouse might distract the Reds during one of your bombing runs.

Configure your choice of nose art in the import selection screen, to line up your favorite airplane decorations.

At last, we can carry the glory of Gaming Goodness into battle. There's truly no limit to the excellence of design in nose art.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Superb flight models; gorgeous graphics; immersive campaign.

90%

LOWS: Difficult waypoint system; weak manual; poorly optimized Internet code; shudder bug.

BOTTOM LINE: A tremendously enjoyable and well-crafted treatment of the pre-missile jet era.

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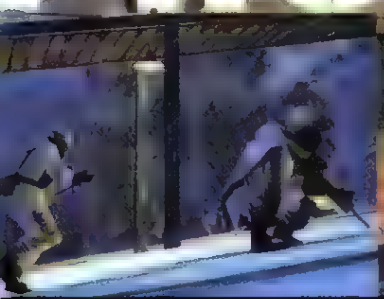

Team Rainbow is back in full force. Rogue Spear, the sequel to PC Gamer's 1998 Action Game of the Year, immerses you even deeper in the explosive action of an elite multinational strike force.

Rogue Spear feels so real, you'll be yelling 'Tango Down!' in your sleep for weeks. And the multiplayer action is to die for. Remember, when stalking the enemy: Walk softly but strike like a thunderbolt. You only have one shot to save the world.

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Seven Kingdoms II

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY: Strategy DEVELOPER: Enlight PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft, (800) UBI-SOFT, *www.ubisoft.com* REQUIRED: Pentium 133, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 35MB hard drive space, Windows compatible sound card WE RECOMMEND: Pentium 300, 32MB RAM, 3Dfx card, 600MB hard-drive space, Joystick, Throttle, Rudders MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS: Modem, Serial, IPX, TCP/IP, Free Internet play: Yes, Maximum players: 8

Enlight returns with a bigger, badder, sleeker version of its 1998 sleeper hit. If you missed it then, you have no excuse now.

Seven Kingdoms has not had it easy. The original game went up against the similarly themed *Age of Empires* with an indifferent ad campaign and weak graphics. It earned critical raves and a substantial core following due to its considerable gameplay, but sales never came near *Age of Empires*-type numbers. *Seven Kingdoms II* is in similar straits, with a very public developer/publisher dispute and a little game by the name of *Age of Empires II* hitting the streets, again at the same time.

And that's just a shame, because these are two very different games with only a passing resemblance. Both begin with a similar premise — real-time empire-building and conquest — but diverge rapidly in the execution. Comparing them is like comparing *WarCraft* and *Civilization*.

Seven Kingdoms II is a deep, rich, incredibly satisfying game that blends myriad gameplay elements with a near-perfect balance. That so many complex facets have been rendered so readily accessible is a testament to the design skill of Trevor Chan. This balance is one of the most striking things about *Seven Kingdoms II*: it manages to encompass the fairly complex elements of a conquest game without overwhelming the gamer. All the tropes are here. You build structures to mine resources (coal, clay, ore) and factories to turn those resources into goods, which you sell to your own people or to foreign markets. Other structures build military units and research new technologies. Caravans haul goods to other towns for trade. You can forge various levels of diplomatic relations with other nations, from trade to war. Neutral towns can be taken over through gold, influence, or conquest. Armies are built from a variety of nationalities and unit types, and are led by skilled leaders. Spies can infiltrate towns and gather information, sow dissent, steal technology, bribe the military, and assassinate. Special items of power impart bonuses to the wielder, some even enabling the building of structures to summon powerful deities.

We've seen these elements in many games, but never combined in such a wholly unique, imaginative, and engrossing way. *Seven Kingdoms II* streamlines and enhances the core gameplay of the original, improving upon, simplifying, or just plain fixing almost everything. The first and most noticeable change is, of course, visual. The graphics in the original were adequate, but about a year out of date, which greatly hampered its ability to find an audience. By contrast, *Seven Kingdoms II* looks quite sharp, with resolutions up to 1024x768, detailed units and structures, decent animation, and more attractive landscape tiles.

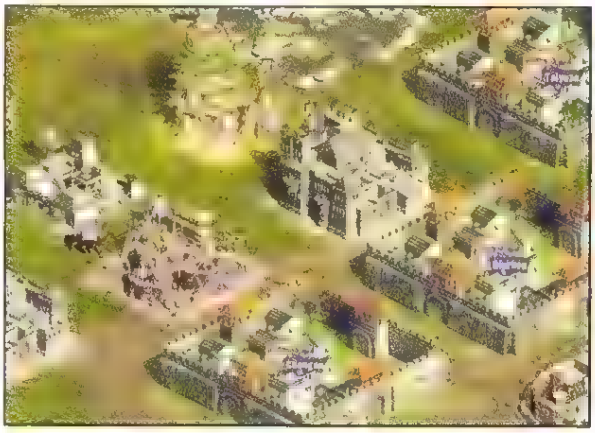
Information windows keep you apprised of everything going on your kingdom, such as the fact that I have a whole lot of spies....

The main view is the familiar top-down perspective of the landscape with an optional panel including a minimap, info boxes, and command buttons. Much of the interface looks similar, but is more compressed and functional. Standard RTS mouse conventions — such as unit grouping and left-click-select/right-click-move — combine with comprehensive key assignments to make selecting and ordering any unit, or calling up any kind of information, very simple. Most improved is the entire trade interface, which was a bear in the first game. Now,

It's fun playing as the bad guys. Here, a band of Fryhtans sack a peaceful town and get rewarded for killing civilians.

An attack by my red force triggers a massive response by the enemy blue forces, including a couple of my own spies (the guys with the eyeballs over their heads).

caravans, their loads, profits, and destinations are combined in a single menu. Individual paths can be created for each, along with custom cargo configuration. This makes tweaking the sometimes complex economy much easier. Unit construction can be queued to the limit of the structure making the units, and units can be given rally points for automatic deployment. Waypointing options (with group formations) provide plenty of flexibility in unit control.

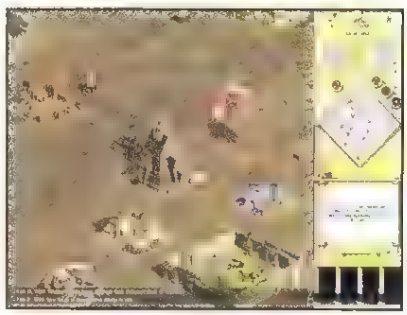


When towns are closely bunched together like this, they provide a strong core for an empire, allowing you to put a quick defense and many civilians in a concentrated area.

There's now a better variety of units, due not only to the new nationalities (bringing the total to 12 human races) but also to the ability to play as the monstrous Fryhtans. Whereas humans need to worry about messy things like reputation and sparing civilians, Fryhtans actually thrive on bad karma and get a bonus for killing innocents. Fryntans breed soldiers in hives, while humans recruit them from the population. The entire Fryhtan economy is based not upon trade, but upon the conquest and enslavement of towns, which generate tribute. Each Fryhtan race also has unique units they can field, including swarms of bees and wild animals.

The role of research has also been expanded. New categories of research enable you to choose which kind of technology to pursue: offensive or defensive, war machines, spying, or trade. The individual advances within each of these technology groups provide specific bonuses, such as improved yield from mines and better ranged attacks, or enable you to build new units or siege engines. Research can also give highly skilled spies some advanced abilities, including stealing technology and inciting trouble abroad. It's not quite as deep as the complexities of the *Civilization* tech tree but it feels just right for a real time game.

In terms of sheer play life, *Seven Kingdoms II* has virtually limitless possibilities. Custom single scenarios are the heart of the game. These can be configured for every element of gameplay: starting wealth, map size, race, Fryhtan aggressiveness, town resistance and dozens of other options. Stand alone missions take place on randomly generated maps of various sizes with two terrain types (traditional and extra rough "badlands"). Randomly generated, non linear campaigns have some interesting potential, but sometimes they can get a little weird. The main campaign screen shows a large view of a territory encompassing several adjoining regions. Events such as Fryhtan raids unfold on this map, and then you go to a standard game map to resolve them. Campaign tasks such as settling a new region are fine and entertaining, but too many missions involved Fryhtan bug hunts with little chance to get into the guts of building an empire. The ability to carry important units from mission to mission keeps the campaign game fresh, but the raids can be a drag.



Once you build a Seat of Power, you can pray to summon a Great Being to help smite thine foe on the battlefield

We've seen these elements in many games, but never combined in such a wholly unique, imaginative, and engrossing way. Seven Kingdoms II streamlines and enhances the core gameplay of the original, improving upon, simplifying, or just plain fixing almost everything.

Enlight has set up a decent Internet server with a clean front end. This was working fine when I tested it in a pre-release final code version, but there was little traffic at the site since the game was not on shelves at the time.

Seven Kingdoms II forges a rare kind of hybrid that falls somewhere between conventional combat-heavy real-time strategy games and more complex civilization-building games. Trade elements, research, diplomacy, race balance, fantastic monsters, mysticism, resource management, construction, expansion, and combat all figure into the mix. That's a lot of balls to keep in the air, but *Seven Kingdoms II* makes it work smoothly and creates one of the most addictive strategy games of the season.

T. Liam McDonald

BUILDING AN INTEGRATED ARMY

One of the more intriguing aspects of *Seven Kingdoms II* is its focus on multi-racial combat forces. It's unlikely that your starting nationality will have all the different unit types to create a well-rounded military of heavy and light infantry, heavy and light cavalry, archers, assassins, and magic-users. This can only be achieved by building an army from different nationalities. You can do this in several ways.

INNS: The quickest but most costly is to simply build inns and buy the units you need. Unless you have deep pockets, this can leave you broke before you get all the necessary units.

TURNCOATS: If you have a good reputation and fight effectively, particularly against Fryhtans, units will switch sides and join your force. The drawback is that you never quite know when this will happen, and these units may be spies. It is, however, the best way to get some very good Fryhtan units in your force.

TOWNS: Each town, neutral or hostile, has a nationality. You can draft units from those towns and build nationality-specific structures once you take it over. When picking neutral towns to conquer, consider the units they'll enable you to build.

Here's an example of a well-composed military force:

INFANTRY: Your basic foot soldier, every nationality has one.

JAPANESE NINJA: Foot soldier, invisible until close.

VIKING AXETHROWER: A powerful ranged attack and good defense.

MONGOL HEAVY CAVALRY: Cheap, blunt shock cavalry.

PERSIAN IMMORTAL CAVALRY: Fast ranged attacks on horseback.

CELTIC DERUVID. A magic wielder who has excellent ranged attacks.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Complex civilization-building elements in a manageable real-time format.

90%

LOWS: Maps could be larger; economics model requires some time to fully grasp.

BOTTOM LINE: *Seven Kingdoms II* improves mightily upon an overlooked strategy sleeper.

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NHL 2000

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY Sports DEVELOPER EA Sports PUBLISHER EA Sports, (650) 628-1001, *www.easports.com* REQUIRED Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 30MB minimum hard-drive space WE RECOMMEND Pentium II 350, 64MB RAM, 400 MB hard-drive space, 4MB 3D accelerator, gamepad MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS Serial, IPX, TCP/IP, Modem, Free Internet play on EA SportsNet, Maximum players: 8

EA's most consistently excellent sports series just keeps on getting better and better....

Like a slow building avalanche, EA Sports' NHL series becomes incrementally more amazing each year. Hockey purists can continue to gripe all they want about how *NHL 2000* still isn't the ultra realistic sim they crave, but they'd just be raining on a great parade. *NHL 2000* is the rare sports game that anyone, regardless of their affection for pro hockey, can enjoy.

For this year's update, EA Sports Canada pulled a couple of superb tricks out of the bag. The usual graphics additions, particularly the vast library of player animations, will make your jaw drop while you're playing in 3D-accelerated mode. Players breathe, wince, exhale deeply after coming to hard stops, and glance around in anticipation before faceoffs. It really looks like human beings out there! Refs and players actually speak angrily after penalty calls — "What are you *talking* about?" is a common player complaint, and should be very familiar to anyone who's ever played hockey and been whistled for anything — and the gloomy expressions of penalized players are rendered as perfectly as the exultant expressions of goal-scorers.

But that's all just cosmetic. The real improvement to the series is a newly tweaked physics model that provides much more lifelike puck movement. This is never more noticeable than when you dump the puck into a corner and then chase it. In previous editions, the puck would either stop cold or continue winging its way around the boards. The designers of *NHL 2000* somehow managed to get it right this time around (yes, that's a compliment — it can't be easy determining when a player means to slap a hard shot around the boards and when he means to just gently dump it in). The subtle improvement makes a huge difference in gameplay; it's never been a good strategy to dump and chase before, but *NHL 2000* rewards smart puck placement in the offensive zone.

Player animations between the whistles create a very lifelike ambience. Twitches, glances, and grimaces abound.

Improved physics and animations create a few more realistic scoring situations, as this goal scorer ends up planted on his face before he can celebrate.

To be sure, the action is still arcade oriented and far from a perfect representation of the real-life game. Passing is still too easy; even on tougher difficulty settings, you'll be able to connect tic-tac-toe passing patterns all over the ice. One improvement, though, is smarter shot-blocking by AI players. On the Pro setting, it's actually a tough challenge to get a slapshot through to the goalie from the point. Defenders block many more than actually get through. Another concession to arcade play is the virtual elimination of deflections and tip-ins; it happened only once in the dozens of games I played, and eventually I stopped bothering to set up deflection plays. Plus, there are still tons of "gimme" goals to be scored, particularly on wrap-around plays, that make sure scoring stays high.

The most subtle improvement, however — so subtle that you might never notice it until the end of a regular season — is the tweaking of the game clock's rundown. In all previous editions, setting the clock to anything less than the regular 20 minutes per period resulted in skewed season statistics; the rest of the league played with 20 minute periods, and your team's stats were all out of whack as a result. *NHL 2000*'s brilliant solution is to scale the passage of time while retaining a 20 minute clock no matter what; in other words, you can set your time setting to "10 minutes," and the game's 20-minute clock will just tick down twice as fast. The result is that every team's season statistics will be retained intact, and will compare correctly. It's a very welcome addition to season play.

Another of *NHL 2000*'s intriguing new features is the ability to import digital photographs (presumably of yourself and your friends, though there's nothing stopping you from importing Oprah Winfrey or Adolf Hitler) into the Create Player screen and wed the face to a player model. This works by using key points on a face diagram to "stretch" the 3D model to the contours of the photo. Sometimes this works really well, and other times it's a total dud. Mine came out all wrong no matter what I tried. This technology is so new and so iffy that I would hesitate to recommend it as a reason to buy the game, but it definitely shows a lot of promise.

In short, the EA's NHL avalanche just keeps gathering momentum. It's pretty enticing to think about where this series might be in another few years if it keeps improving at this pace.

Daniel Morris

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

89%

HIGHS: More realistic physics; importable player faces; clock scheme provides good stats.

LOWS: Still lacks sim credibility; too many gimme goals; importing faces only kinda works.

BOTTOM LINE: The best of the NHL series, and that *still* says something.

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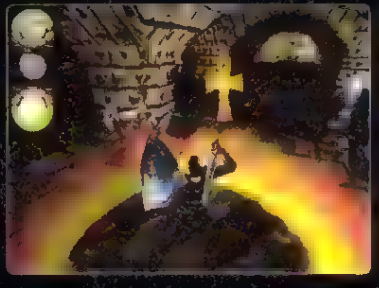

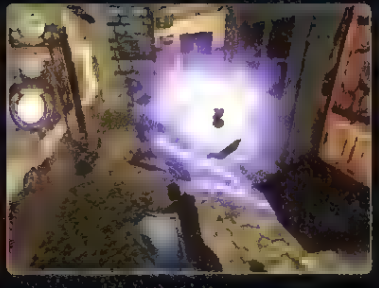

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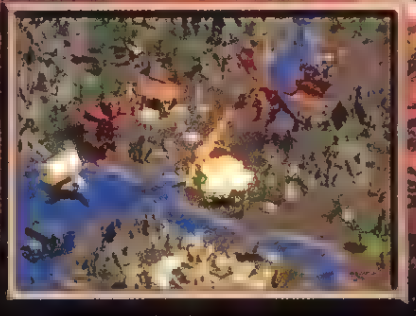

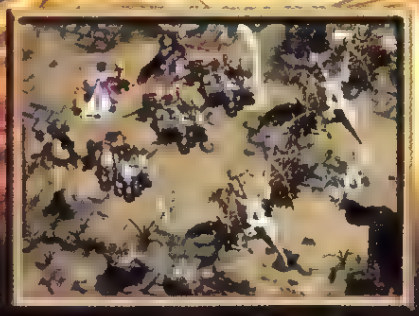

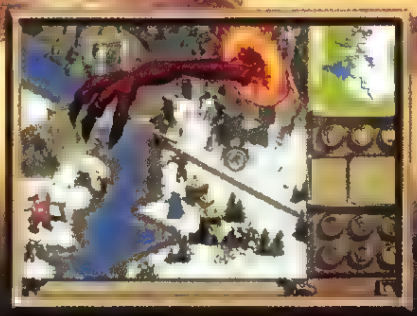

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Flight Unlimited III

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY: Flight sim DEVELOPER: Looking Glass PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts, (800) 245-4525, *www.ea.com* REQUIRED: Pentium 233, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 300MB hard-drive space, Windows compatible sound card, Mouse, Keyboard WE RECOMMEND: Pentium 400, 64MB RAM, 3D card, 2.1GB hard-drive space, Joystick, Throttle, Rudders MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS: None

Looking Glass follows up its *System Shock 2* triumph with a flight simulator that knocks the competition out of the sky.

Within the space of a few months, three major new civil aviation sims will have hit the shelves. Each of them does several things very well. None of them does *everything* very well. But amongst *Fly!*, *Microsoft Flight Simulator 2000*, and *Flight Unlimited III*, it looks like *FU3* will emerge as the one that does the most right.

This should come as little surprise, since *Flight Unlimited* is from Looking Glass, a developer that moves the chains farther downfield with every new release. *Flight Unlimited* exploded onto the sim scene with physics and flight models that trumped long time sim titan Microsoft. The step between *Flight Unlimited* and *Flight Unlimited II* was radical and also revolutionary, eschewing the aerobatic planes of the first game for a more sedate experience in a limited, yet amazingly detailed, region. *FU3* doesn't make the same great leap, but continues the *FU2* tradition by doing everything a little bigger and a little better.

For those of you comparison shopping, here are the basics. *FlightSim 2000* does the best cross-country flying, *Fly!* has the best cockpits and instruments, and *FU3* has the best modeling, weather, and graphics. That's the short of it. Now for the long.

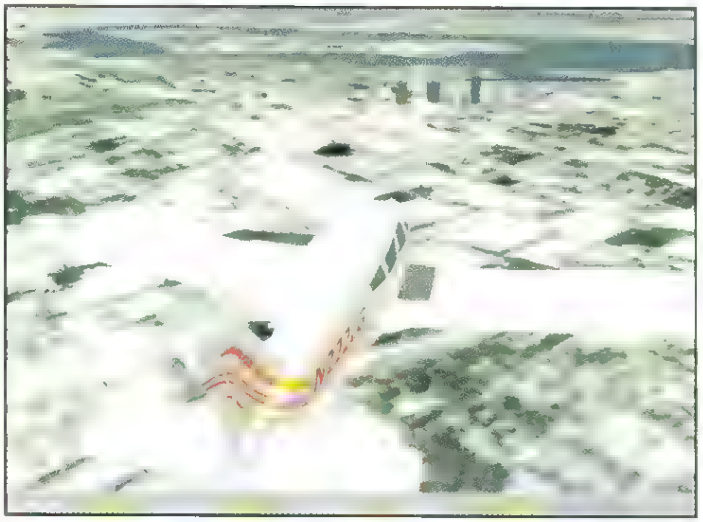
When you're going up against the best selling franchise in the history of the genre (*MS FlightSim*), the first order of business is to find a way to be different. Looking Glass' first offering did indeed have a better physics and flight model, but Microsoft's was still very strong. Microsoft's graphics, however, ran slowly and tended to chunk. In spreading itself across the entire globe, *MS* was unable to do any one region in any great depth. *FU2* focused in on the San Francisco Bay Area and rendered an 11,000 square mile area in meticulous detail. The contours, the textures, the buildings: everything was there in glorious, hardware-accelerated detail, when hardware acceleration was still pretty new. No, you couldn't fly from Spokane to Miami, but who would really *want* to? (Please send your answers to *dan@pcgamer.com*.) One small, outstanding-looking region with plenty to see and do is better than a vast, barren landscape with little to see or do. That was the appeal.

A sea plane flies into some heavy weather looming ahead. You can generate any kind of weather you want instantly.

Flight Unlimited III replays the same scenario in the Pacific Northwest, with an even finer recreation of everything from Mount Ranier to the Space Needle. *FU2*'s graphics were so far ahead of the pack that Looking Glass had little room to improve upon them, but they still managed to coax some surprises out of the engine. Owners of *FU2* can even load its Bay Area scenery into *FU3* for continuous flying from the Bay to Seattle. Those who are overly impressed with massive airport databases (which can indeed be impressive) will be disappointed to learn that only sixty airports come with this game. Unlike those in *Fly!* and *Flight Sim*, however, each airport features 3D buildings and accurate surrounding terrain.

The visual strengths go beyond landscapes and objects. *Flight Unlimited III* does weather like no one else, both visually and physically. Rain beading and running up the windows looks outstanding, as do thunderheads, snow, and other visible weather phenomena. More importantly, the weather modeling can really be felt in the cockpit. Only *Flight Unlimited III* really nails heavy weather flight and its effect on an aircraft. You can set up any weather situation for any time of the year and place yourself in the middle of it. A wonderful "weather editor" lets you pick season, phase of the moon, and other factors and then generate dynamic weather fronts. You can then hop into a plane and ride it out. With the tight force feedback support, you can really feel the effects in the stick as much as see it through the windshield.

The world is wide open, so you can fly anywhere, anytime you want. Quick flight options let you pick a place on the map (a tourist attraction, or maybe an airport) and begin either on the ground or in the air. A dozen odd "scenarios" provide specific challenges and even come with some corny narration. These range from a Bigfoot-spotting expedition to running a commuter junket, and each ends with some indication of mission success or failure. All

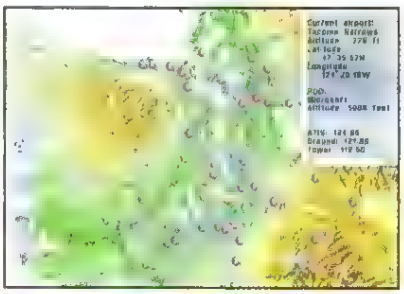


You can see Seattle off in the distance. Unlike the cities in *Fly!*, those in *FU3* loaded smoothly and caused little frame rate drop.

the maps and settings are pretty much lifted right out of *FU2*, but one element that has been greatly improved is training. Marvelously detailed, multi-chapter training texts and diagrams each culminate in two flight options: a complete, narrated, teacher flown mission, or a fly-it-yourself mission. You can read the lesson, watch it flown, then try your hand at it. For people just starting with aviation, it is second to none as a learning tool

Flight Unlimited III does weather like no one else, both visually and physically. Rain beading and running up the windows looks outstanding, as do thunderheads, snow, and other visible weather phenomena.

Of course the pressing question is, how does it fly? As expected, Looking Glass does not disappoint. Ten airplane models are included. The Stemme S10 VT Motorglider, Beechjet 400A Mooney TLS Bravo, Lake Renegade 270 Seaplane, Cessna 172, Piper Arrow Muskrat Seaplane, Windhawk Twin, and Fokker tri plane provide a wide cross-section of aircraft. Taking on props, Sunday morning fliers, gliders, warplanes, seaplanes, and private jets is a pretty tall order, but in putting them through their paces I found little room for complaint. Each handles the way I'd expect it to, with fast climbs in the Fokker, slow turns in the jet, and tricky landings for the sea planes. Matched to this strong flight modeling is an equally strong physics model, which not only creates the aforementioned weather effects, but also temperature changes, altitude effects, turbulence, and more. In terms of pure feel, it's the best flying experience you will find



You can set a plane anywhere in the world by picking a spot on the map in Quick Flight.

Some of the other details are good but not the best I've seen. Cockpits are each different and pretty accurate, complete with overlays and interactive buttons. After *Fly!*, however, the cockpit bar has been considerably raised. The panning, detailed, wholly *right* cockpits found in *Fly!* are simply better than those in *FU3*. *Flight Unlimited III* has everything you'd need and some extras, including good weather radar and multi function displays, but they just don't match the GPS and other instrument models in *Fly!* I also found the cockpits a little cramped and hard to scan. There are enough pilot views to satisfy anyone, including full screen, reduced instruments, full cockpit, and virtual cockpit, along with a wide range of exterior cameras. Cockpit chatter is also a bit less fulfilling than in *Fly!*, though the environment does seem more alive with air traffic

One wholly unexpected feature of *FU3* absolutely floored me. It's called FLED, for Flight Editor, and it is nothing less than a world editor. Using a graphical interface and set of utilities, you can place objects within the *FU* world. These objects are drawn from a vast palette and include buildings, lights, planes, and other three-dimensional models. Using FLED, you can not only place static objects, but designate *moving* 3D objects and create whole new airports from scratch. You can place almost anything anywhere in the world map, and the more adventurous can tinker with textures outside of FLED

The beauty of the scenery, the wealth of plane, weather, and flight options, the rock solid modeling, and the excellent learning system all combine to make *Flight Unlimited III* the first place you should stop if you're exploring the world of non-combat simulation, and an essential stop for any serious sim enthusiast. It might not have all the scope of the competition, but it has detail to spare

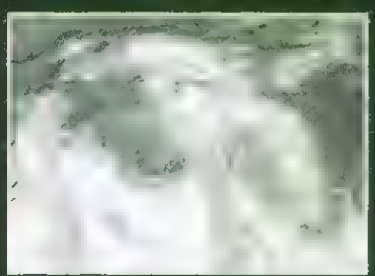
T. Liam McDonald

The Sights of Seattle

Buzz Bill Gates' expensive new house

...the Microsoft campus of offices

Live it you can reach into the Space Needle



And try not to run into Mount Rainier

...or get lost in the valleys of Olympic Park.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

90%

HIGHS: Highly accurate flight models; terrific weather effects; detailed scenery.

LOWS: Limited to one small region; frame rates will suffer on anything less than a P400.

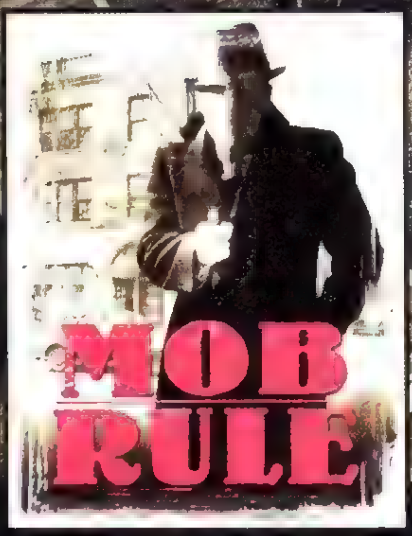
BOTTOM LINE: A top-notch civil aviation sim and an excellent continuation of the series.

www.DailyRadar.com

"The Godfather Meets Sim City"—What more could an aspiring street thug ask for?"—Antagonist/www.aol.com

"Extortion has never been so much fun!"
—PC Gamer

MOB RULE



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Silver

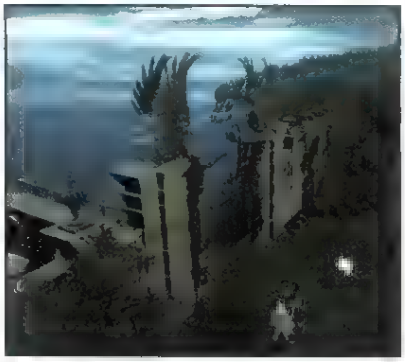
CATEGORY Role-playing DEVELOPER Infogrames PUBLISHER Infogrames North America, (800) 245-7744, *www.infogrames.com* REQUIRED Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 160MB free hard drive space, DirectX compatible video card with 2MB RAM WE RECOMMEND Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 12x CD-ROM drive MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS None

With just a bit more polish, this stylish RPG would shine like its name implies.

For some strange reason, many people have compared *Silver* to *Final Fantasy VII*. In this case, that's a bit like comparing a Ford Mustang and a Chevy Impala — they both have wheels and an engine, but that's where the similarities end. The only similarity between the two games is the general Japanese-y look and feel of the graphics — 3D characters with big heads, small bodies, and huge swords against 2D pre-rendered backgrounds.

Silver puts you in charge of David, a young hero to be who begins his journey against the forces of evil when agents of the Emperor Silver kidnap his wife, Jennifer. As you journey from astronomical observatories to the lairs of Silver's ill-tempered progeny, you'll meet new adventurers to join in the fight and encounter a plethora of monsters to vanquish in true fantasy role-playing style.

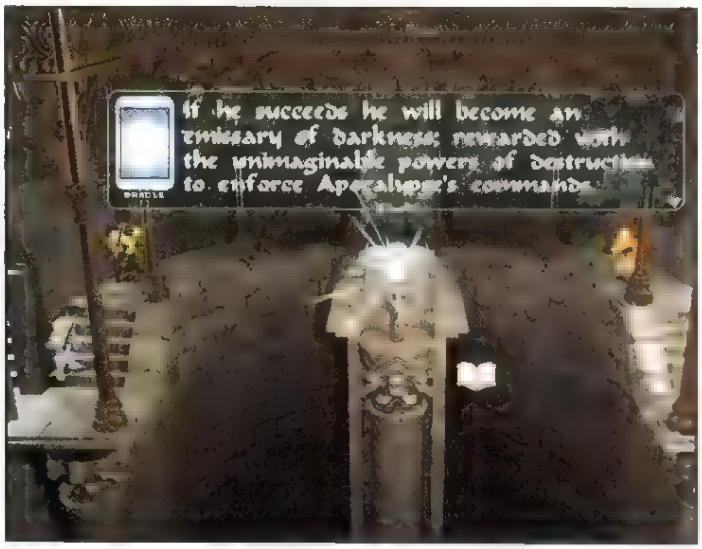
The game contains some fairly inventive, if imperfect, real-time combat. You view the action from a third-person perspective, with camera angles that change depending on the environment. To initiate an attack against an enemy, you simply hold down the Control key and the left mouse button while moving the mouse in a direction corresponding to a certain attack. For example, holding Control, pressing the left mouse button, and moving the mouse up makes David lunge forward in a death-dealing thrust. Pressing the right mouse button puts the character in defensive mode.



The beautiful backgrounds feature special effects such as rain or these electric bursts.

The problems emerge when there is more than one character under your control. Although you start the game with David and his grandfather, and you don't control Grandpa at all, eventually you'll have as many as two other members in your party, which can be manipulated independently of each other. Unfortunately, the computer AI isn't intelligent enough to consistently utilize the characters not under your immediate control — thus, if you're foraging ahead into a pack of enemies with David, other party members will stand around doing nothing. This is especially annoying with those characters using ranged weapons.

The artificial intelligence only seems to take over combat in melees, not in ranged attacks. This makes multi-front combat about as frustrating as teaching a cat to swim.


If he succeeds he will become an emissary of darkness rewarded with the unimaginable powers of destruction to enforce Apocalypse's commands.

Cut scenes and plot elements are displayed seamlessly while you're in-game, so you're never taken out of the action for any reason.

Aside from these flaws in the real-time combat, however, the game contains plenty of appealing elements. The magic system is based on special orbs, which David must collect. With a particular orb equipped, like Fire or Ice, a character can fire blasts that do damage with some very gratifying special effects. (In fact, all of the graphics look fantastic, and they don't require a 3D accelerator or even a terribly powerful system.) As David adventures, he finds various types of food, all of which restore his health. Potions abound that do the same thing, as well as impart special advantages upon the party or the enemy. A variety of weapons means David and his gang can find new and inventive ways of skewering the opposition, including different ranged weapons.

The linear storyline, however, will not appeal to some players. The game progresses from point A to point B, and although the plot contains plenty of loops and twists, it's only about as free-form as a Stephen King novel.

Once you get the map, you can quickly travel the world and save at any point.

Silver has been available in Europe for some time, and one major complaint heard on the other side of the Atlantic has been addressed for the U.S. release. Although the game uses save points in true console form, the U.S. version contains 40 percent more save points in the first part of the game, and when David finally acquires a map that lets him travel from point to point, you can return to a particular spot and save the game at any time.

If you're looking for an entertaining romp with an interesting plot that won't tax your brain or your CPU too much, this is one to check out.

Michael Wolf

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

81%

HIGHS: Pretty graphics; fun real-time combat; entertaining story.

LOWS: Controlling multiple characters can be frustrating.

BOTTOM LINE: It's like a date with Sandra Bernhardt — *Silver* is a lot of fun, but you won't want to spend the rest of your life with it.

Amerzone

CATEGORY Adventure DEVELOPER: Casterman PUBLISHER Microids, 33 (0) 1 46 01 54 01, *www.microids.com* REQUIRED 4X CD ROM drive, Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 60MB hard drive space WE RECOMMEND 64MB RAM, Pentium II MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS None

This is like being trapped in the middle of a brain-addled Frenchman's drug fantasy (and no, it's not as fun as that sounds).

Based on the freaky comic book from Benoît Sokal, *Amerzone* is brought to some semblance of life in this four-CD graphical adventure. I stumbled my way through the whole game, and I'm still having a hard time summing up the plot

Basically, the main character needs to bring a giant White Bird egg (one of the many clever names that exist in the game) back to the Amerzone River from where it was stolen a generation before. Why? I'm not sure. Where? Some fictional South American country How? On the most confusing and erratic path possible

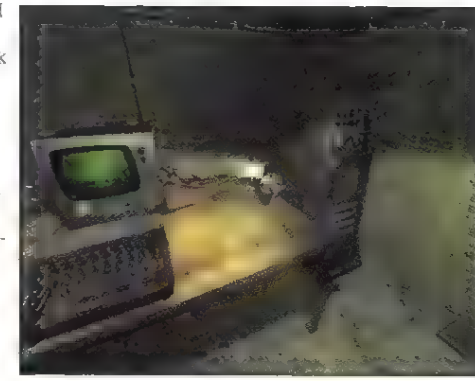
Here's an example: When a water buffalo runs off with your gear attached to his horns (believe it, folks, that's how it happens), you chase him to a dead end and then...it's obvious — backtrack, walk into the woods, then wander around for half a day until you find a tranquilizer gun waiting for you to knock him out. Nice

Even the letters and documentation that you find are confusing. If you can even read the writing, the language is filled with broken sentences and misspellings — "You may thing that I am bitter" oh, I just don't know what to thing, since publisher Microids provides a minimum of instruction. A single fold-out CD liner barely explains how to manipulate the game interface, much less explain on what's going on

The journey centers around your Hydraflot, a vehicle capable of transforming from plane to submarine to sailboat to grappling unit, but of course you'll get out along the way and interact with all kinds of crazies. They speak very intensely about cryptic events, which is supposed to add some kind of drama

One source of unintended enjoyment was the Hydraflot's checklist that it ran down every time I fired up the engines: Fuel, check. Details (read: ship's heading), check. Egg, check. Gotta make sure that egg's in the back or we're turning this thing around right now, kids!

To be fair, *Amerzone*'s graphics are often impressive. It's a *Myst* style click and explore interface, but you're allowed to view all 360 degrees of the world. The cut scenes blend nicely with the game engine, and the animations of the Hydraflot's transformations are fun to watch But some areas of the game are way too dark, and there's no way to increase the brightness of the visuals.



Just like in any click-and-survey puzzle game, each location features lots of pretty things to look at and one useful item that makes no logical sense at all.

The score and sound effects are hit and miss. The jungle ambiance is appropriately done, but speech is often hard to hear (even with the in game and system volume turned all the way up). Each and every time I tried to go back to find a character and hear a speech again, I learned the person was dead Initially hilarious, this device soon became downright creepy

When a game in this somewhat curious genre is designed correctly, like Cyberflix's *Titanic: Adventure out of Time*, it's a challenging and delectable use of your time — you have to pay attention and make the right decisions, and the end goal is always kept in sight When it's done poorly, as in the case of *Amerzone*, it's a frustrating cycle of wandering and mouse-dragging, trying to find the red bug or dead bird or dead bug bird that for some illogical reason your character *has* to have before he can move on. Grrr. I recommend you follow one of the sub character's advice — "You still have time to backtrack and try, if possible, to forget about the Amerzone."

—Joel Strauch

It's the COBRA Hydrafoil! "Coooobra!" Actually, this is your means of transportation.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

20%

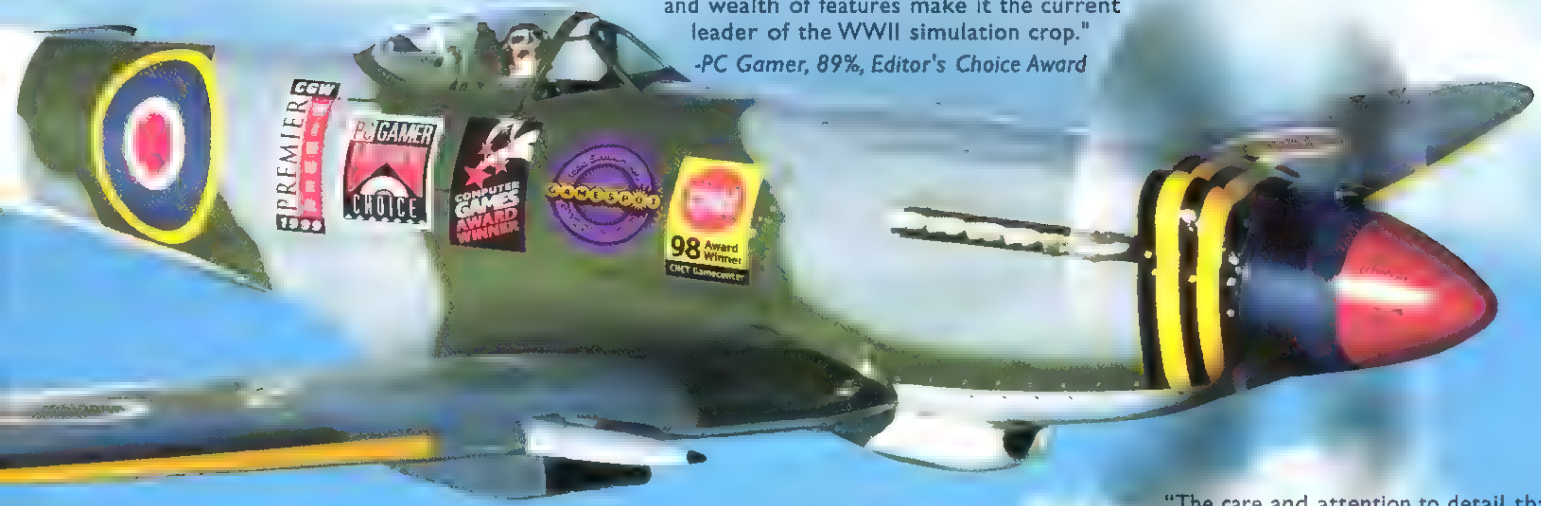
HIGHS: Impressive graphics; decent musical score.

LOWS: Disjointed storyline; annoying hunt-and-gather adventuring.

BOTTOM LINE: If defective French fantasy-adventures are your bag (that's a big *if*), this still isn't worth your time or money.

www.DailyRadar.com

"European Air War's outstanding gameplay and wealth of features make it the current leader of the WWII simulation crop."
-PC Gamer, 89%, Editor's Choice Award



"European Air War succeeds at providing the experience that makes arm-chair fighter pilots believe they're truly leaving their mundane surroundings behind"
-Gamespot

"This World War II simulation captured the feeling of being in a living, unpredictable combat environment better than any other sim released this past year"
-Computer Gaming World, 4 stars

"The care and attention to detail that went into every aspect of European Air War, from the hefty manual to the bomber nose art, represents a serious achievement"
-CNET GameCenter

RACKING UP THE KILLS!

"Bottom line: this sets the new standard in flight sims"
-Washington Post

"No previous sim covers so many different weapons and so many tasks in detail... it's all here and it's all beautifully executed"
-PC Gamer, 95%, Editor's Choice Award

"Falcon 4.0 is an incredibly detailed simulation that in many ways exceeds training systems in military use."
-Computer Gaming World

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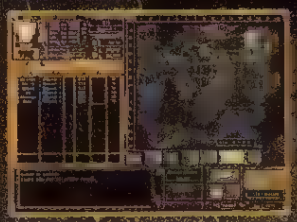

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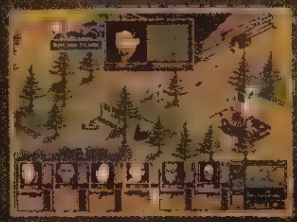

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You Don't Know Jack Offline

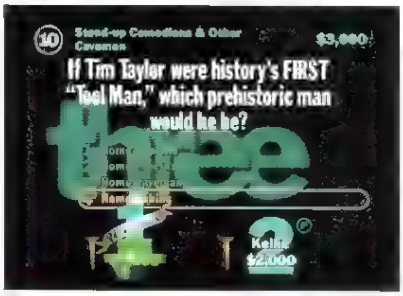
CATEGORY Puzzle DEVELOPER Jellyvision PUBLISHER Berkeley Systems/Havas Interactive, (800) 757-7707, *www.berksys.com* REQUIRED 486MHz processor, 16MB RAM, 35MB HD space, Sound Blaster 16 or compatible WE RECOMMEND Pentium 166 or higher, 32MB RAM MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS Hotseat 3

Berkeley Systems is back again with yet another incarnation of its multiple award-winning and best selling trivia franchise, *You Don't Know Jack*. But this time around, it's a compilation of questions taken from the "best of the Internet version of *Jack*, hosted by the BeZerk Network (*www.bezerk.com*) Two hundred all-new questions have been added, making the final tally 1,000. The resulting behemoth is *You Don't Know Jack Offline*, and while the production values are somewhat lower than the other *Jack* CD-ROMs, such as *The Ride* or *YDKJ Movies*, the challenging pop culture questions and irreverence are still there.

All the beloved *Jack* question types can be found in *Jack Offline*, including "Dis or Dat," "Gibberish Question" and "Jack Attack," plus there's one new addition -- "Pissed About a Question" based on irate letters received by the *Jack* writers. It would've been great, however, to be able to choose specific "shows" beforehand as gamers are able to do online, such as "The All Nude Episode" "Pets," "Cartoons and Comics," "The Windy City," and so forth. Fortunately, the always sarcastic and brazen host, Tom Gottlieb, is in fine form on the disc.

All in all, *You Don't Know Jack Offline* is perfect for those who can't get enough *Jack* and would rather play from the CD-ROM than log on to play off the BeZerk Network. The game's audio and animated visuals are noticeably better than the Internet version (plus, there's no Web commercials to sit through!), but as I said earlier, they're slightly inferior when compared to polished past CD products and compilation packs (*Jumbo*, *XXXL*, *Huge*, etc..). But for under $30, it's still *Jack*, and for that, it's worth every penny.

Marc Saltzman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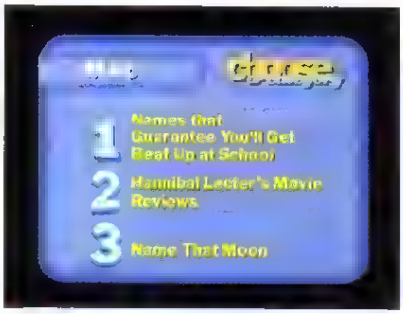
If Tim Taylor were history's FIRST "Tool Man," which prehistoric man would he be?
Kelly
$2,000

As always, the questions thrown at you are surprisingly informative, as well as funny



It's a unique treat to find a game where the question categories are an endless delight.

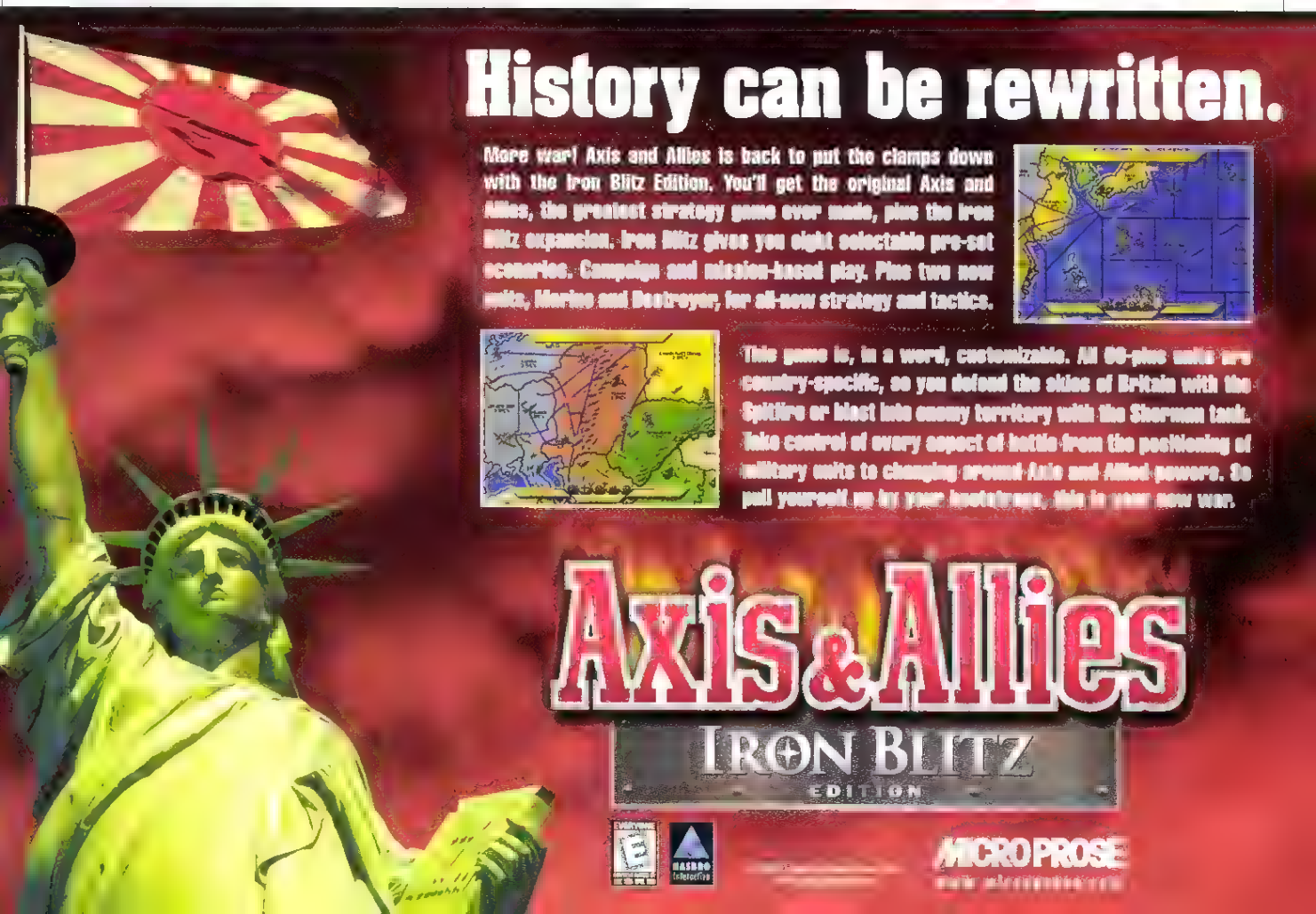
PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

80%

WINGS: Our beloved host is in fine form; new question modes.

LOWS: Well, you can't play this online; not as polished as earlier games and compilation packs.

BOTTOM LINE: If logging on to the BeZerk Network is too much trouble, this is your game.


History can be rewritten.
More war! Axis and Allies is back to put the clamps down with the Iron Blitz Edition. You'll get the original Axis and Allies, the greatest strategy game ever made, plus the Iron Blitz expansion. Iron Blitz gives you eight selectable pre-set scenarios. Campaign and mission-based play. Plus two new units, Marine and Destroyer, for all-new strategy and tactics.
This game is, in a word, customizable. All 66-plus units are country-specific, so you defend the skies of Britain with the Spitfire or blast into enemy territory with the Sherman tank. Take control of every aspect of battle from the positioning of military units to changing around Axis and Allied powers. So pull yourself up by your bootstraps, this is your new war.
Axis & Allies
IRON BLITZ
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"The absolute best TV output quality we've seen" - Computer Games Online

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"The highest quality software DVD on the TV I've seen" - 3DGaming.com

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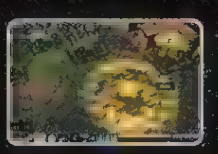
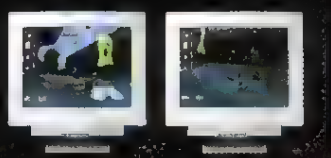


3D Environment-Mapped Bump Mapping



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Attack of the Saucerman

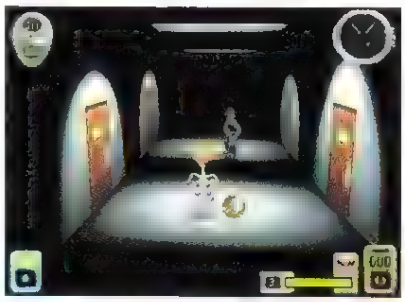
CATEGORY Action DEVELOPER Fube Industries PUBLISHER Psygnosis, (800) 438-7794, *www.psygnosis.com* REQUIRED P166 or AMD K6, 16 MB RAM, 0.2 MB HD space, 1MB 3D graphics card WE RECOMMEND Pentium 200, AMD K6-2, 4MB 3D graphics card MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS None

Attack of the Saucerman had a huge strike against it before I even installed the game: no printed manual. Printed inside the jewel case behind the CD are instructions to execute Acrobat Reader and then read or print the manual. Let's just say, game reviewers consider that the first, worst sign, like a child psychologist who encounters an underage arsonist.

You play as a ropy, bug-eyed orange alien named Ed (viewed from a third-person perspective), a member of an intergalactic security force. You and your side kick are all that can prevent the villain Big Bubba, from taking over the earth. You track Bubba through military bases, Victorian England, prehistory, and mesoAmerica, all while collecting "Neds" (cute little yellow munchkins that threaten the ecosystem) and killing the humans you're supposedly trying to save whenever they get in your way. I guess one has to destroy the Earth to save it. Maybe there's a lesson somewhere in there along with the bad gameplay.

This is basically a myopic, small scale shooter: control is slow and slightly kludgy, but it doesn't affect aiming much because you can't look up or down, and your guns aim automatically at targets above or below you. AI consists of enemies running straight toward you and firing. All in all, it's a mind-numbing experience not worth your time or money.

Jeff Miller



***Saucerman* is not as fun as it looks — not that it looks all that fun. It's best avoided.**

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT 29%

Email X-COM

CATEGORY Turn based strategy DEVELOPER Hasbro Interactive PUBLISHER Hasbro Interactive, (800) 400-1352 *http://email.games.com* REQUIRED 486/66, 8MB RAM, 11MB HD space, Modem, Internet connection WE RECOMMEND: P60, 16MB RAM MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS E-mail, Max players: 2

Email X-COM is the latest and most curious entry in Hasbro's series of E-mail games. Previous titles include *Scrabble*, *Battleship*, and *Chess, Checkers, & Backgammon*, each feeling more like a feature from another game than a stand-alone title. These are clearly products aimed at middle America Wal-Mart shoppers, not the high-tech gaming wonks that read *PC Gamer*, but they sometimes have their limited charms.

Of the E-mail games to date, *X-COM* is the weakest because it strays the farthest from the source material. The maps are tiny, bare-bones, top-down views of a battlefield. There are 35 maps that can be played as X-COM or as the aliens, but since unit starting locations are not randomized, replay value is seriously limited. Units are moved through the map in a hunt for the other guy's units. First one to wipe out the enemy wins.

The mechanics are simple, with tiny move files sent as E-mail from inside the program. The receiving player watches your move and responds. If they don't own the game, they can download the move reader for free.

This is a low-rent title with very limited gameplay and minimal appeal for seasoned gamers. On the positive side, it's cheap, simple, and quick, so you can view it as neatly enhanced E-mail rather than as crappy computer gaming. But it's only related to X-COM if you squint.

T. Liam McDonald

Sure it looks and plays like shareware, but it can at least be played really easily

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT 55%

Go to www.pcgamer.com/request Product #747

How many commandos can you find below?

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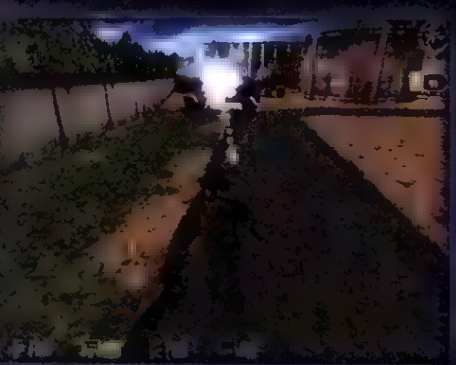

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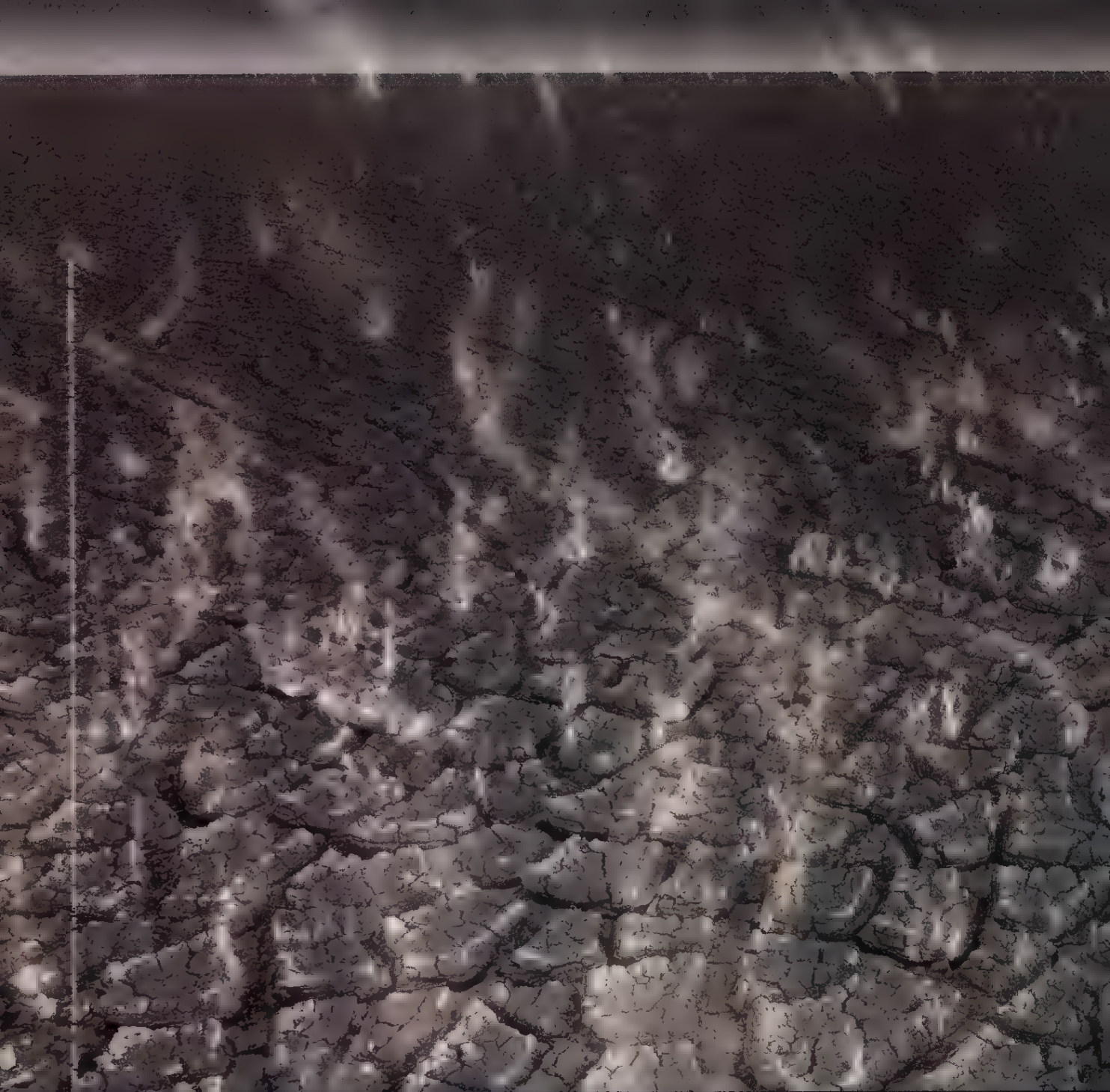

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DECEMBER 1999

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IN JUST 40 EASY-TO-DIGEST STEPS

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Into This Kick-Ass System!

It's so easy, even Whitta could do it...

[IF HE COULD BE BOTHERED]

HSCONTENTS

It Keeps Getting Better

It's been a very busy month for me here at the Hard Stuff labs. Not only did I have to spend two full days in a grueling photo shoot for our "How to Build a PC in 40 Easy Steps" feature, but I've also been trying to get GeForce 256 cards for review. It was tougher than you might think, although I did end up getting the boards, the drivers for the GeForce aren't yet final so we go to press. So I'm holding off on the reviews until next month when both the Guillemot and the Creative Labs board should be running on final drivers. Don't fret, though, because Guillemot's GeForce 256-based 3D Prophet was sent to us for use in this month's review of Falcon's latest and greatest Mach V PC. This means you'll get plenty of tasty info now, just in case you can't wait until next month to buy a new video card.

Other than that, I've also been working on our new Sideways Page. The old page was okay, but now it's even better. Instead of alternating every month between listing every competitive video card or sound card ever made from so far back as two years ago, the new format includes our favorite components for budget, mid-range, and hi-end systems, right down to the motherboard, monitor, case, and speakers! Look for me to be updating the prices and components each month as the market changes. Oh, and did I mention that we'll be giving away the system I built for the feature? That's right, flip to page 203 for all the details. Happy holidays, everyone!

Greg Vederman, technical editor

PENNIES ON THE DOLLAR

How to Build a PC in 40 Easy Steps!

PAGE 194

Technical Editor Greg Vederman (well, his hands, at least) shows you how to build this game-worthy PC for significantly less money than you'd shell out for one of those under-powered retail systems.

REVIEWS

- ***FALCON NORTHWEST COMPUTER SYSTEM*** PAGE 210
  The fine folks over at Falcon whipped up one heck of a computer for us this month. Not only does it pack the power of a 700MHz AMD Athlon processor, but it's also our first look at Guillemot's new GeForce 256-based 3D Prophet video card.
- ***MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER DUAL STRIKE*** . . . . . PAGE 208
  Yet another of the "replace your mouse and keyboard in first- and third-person action games" type controllers, the Dual Strike actually works pretty well
- ***MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER GAMEPAD PRO*** PAGE 208
  Microsoft has a new gamepad on the market, but is it everything we could have possibly hoped for? No, not really find out why.

How We Rate the Hard Stuff

You've been around long enough to know the greatest technology doesn't mean a thing unless it improves the games you love to play. Our reviews focus on real-world testing, but when a number is in order for comparisons, we use the benchmarking tools developed by our hardware-frenzied sister publication, *Maximum PC*. Between our testing and the BenchMarks, we'll give you the lowdown on which devices perform and which ones fizzle.

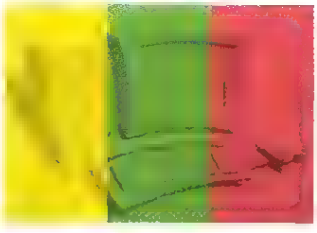
PC Gamer Editors' Choice Award

Every month, we honor the best peripherals, utilities, and hardware we test with our Editors' Choice award. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on hardware at a local computer store, you can be sure it's among the best.

TRINITY

It's the ALL-NEW Sideways Page!

An indispensable guide to buying the best gaming system, regardless of your budget. Check out all the up-to-date parts and prices that *PC Gamer* recommends for low-end, midrange, and hi-end systems! PAGE 203



DEAR GREG

This month, Greg shows off his mad skills when he tackles two questions regarding the voltage of various components in your PC. Also, he manages to avoid a close call involving a sexual innuendo that isn't at all appropriate PAGE 212

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PENNIES ON THE DOLLAR

IN 40 STEPS, GREG SHOWS YOU HOW EASY AND INEXPENSIVE IT IS TO BUILD A NEW PC

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON LAUER

I've been getting a lot of E-mails since the Hard Stuff Revenge was recently back. What a lot of people want to know is: "Where'd that good 'ol Sideways Page run off too?" Many people, including myself, felt that the old Sideways Page had run its course; it simply wasn't as useful as it should have been. That said, I had no intentions of ever getting rid of the page entirely; rather, my goal was to improve it. The new improved Sideways Page (now called the Hi Trinity Page) on page 203 will be a regular staple now, and instead of just reviewing small reviews of every gamepad on the planet or every joystick under the sun, the page will contain only the products that we recommend for low-end, mid-range, and high-end systems. The components that make up each of these three computers — along with the lowest price we could find for them on the Internet — will change as newer, better hardware comes in to replace them.

While many of you will likely use the Trinity Page as a guide to the best gear on the market, many others may find that they want to build entirely new systems using the parts we recommend. This feature is for those people.

Although I initially wanted to build the high-end system, several key components weren't available in time for this feature. So instead, I decided to build our new mid-range system since all its parts were readily available and easy to track down. Either way, this primer should be an invaluable resource as you put together the system of your dreams (or at the very least, a quality gaming system that won't put you in the poorhouse!). For a rundown of the parts used, please refer to the Trinity Page on page 208.

A few important things to mention before we get started:

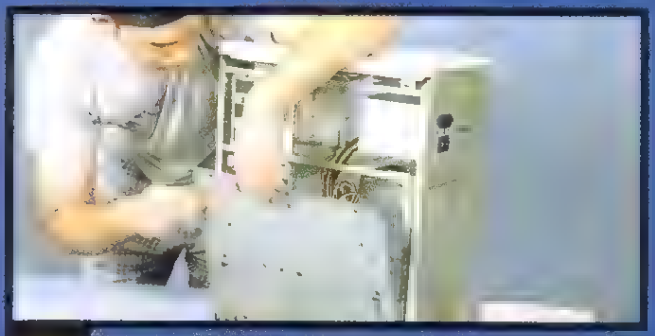
1.) Always make certain that you are grounded before working on your PC. Even the smallest amount of static electricity can severely damage your system. To do this, have some part of your body touching the metal frame of your computer case at all times. Also, try to avoid working on carpeting.

2.) Don't ever force anything to fit. If it doesn't want to go, it's a part isn't fitting in the way it should, pause and make certain you're putting it in the correct way.

3.) Don't overturn those screws! Make sure they're snug, but don't go nuts.

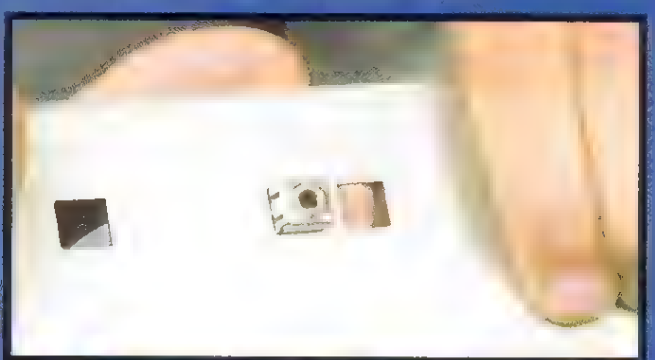
4.) Keep those manuals! They'll come in very handy — especially when it comes to the motherboard.

1 In the beginning: Here we have all the pieces that will eventually make up our mid-range gaming system (Minus the speakers and monitor — ed.). There's a lot to do, so let's get cracking!



2 After opening our case, the first thing we need to do is take out the tray that our motherboard will attach to. The Addonics case had several screws that need to be removed before the tray will come free. Make certain you find them all before you try to take it out.

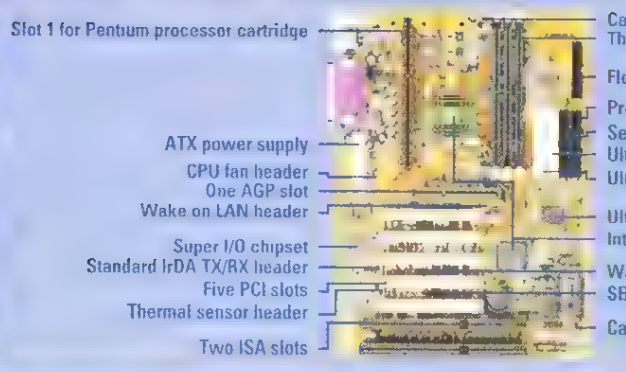
3 To avoid electrical shorts, the motherboard needs to attach to the tray via multiple metal risers. In our case, we ran out of metal risers, so we used the included plastic risers for a couple holes (see page 181).



4 These risers have screws holes in them; they snap into the motherboard tray with a good push from behind. Place one of these risers in each hole on the tray that corresponds to a screw hole on the motherboard.

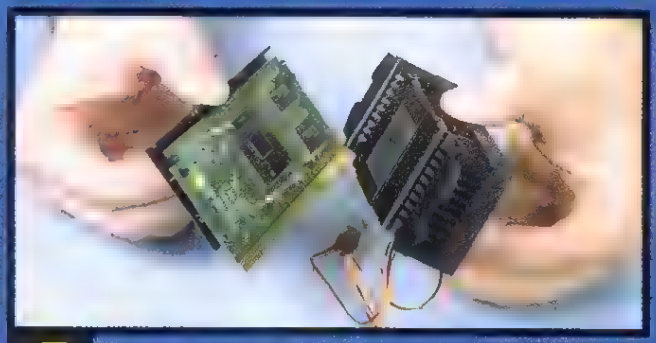
YOUR MOTHERBOARD: A-BIT BE6

Building a computer can be a tricky affair if you aren't familiar with the layout of your motherboard prior to stepping out on your own. Let this picture be your guide while building, and a place to go back to if you get confused. If you aren't using the BE6, your motherboard will still look fairly similar to the A-Bit board we used, so you should still be able to look here to find the more important locations on your board (e.g. the location of the AGP, PCI, and ISA slots).



5 Once all the mounts are in place, simply use the screws that come with the case, and secure the motherboard to the tray.

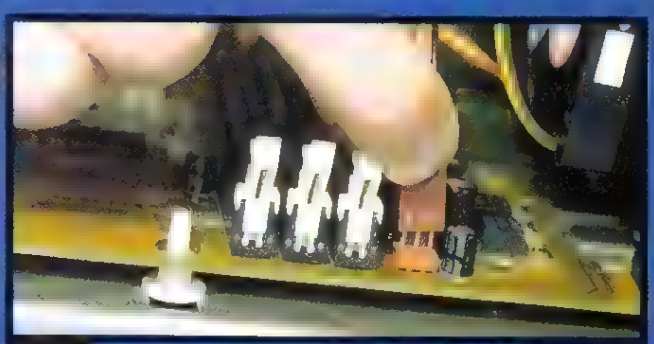
6 With the motherboard now loosened to the tray, it's time to start plugging things in. If your CPU came with a fan and it's not [illegible], now's a good time to start putting the pieces together.



7 Every fan/heatsink combo is a bit different, but in our example, the fan comes ready with a small thermal plate to help conduct heat (the [illegible] silver square in the middle). If yours doesn't have this, make sure to apply a small amount of thermal compound prior to attaching the unit.

8 Once your CPU is ready to go, install the two plastic CPU rails to the motherboard. These rails attach to both sides of the CPU slot and help keep your processor in place.

9 When both rails are installed, simply snap your processor into place. Be certain to push straight down when doing this, being extra careful not to force the chip. If you're having difficulties, make certain that the CPU is facing the proper direction — it only fits in one way.



10 Next, plug in any and all power cables coming from the tray, as your CPU heatsink to the motherboard. The three-pronged many plugs can be found right near your CPU slot and only fit in one way, so you don't have to worry about messing it up.

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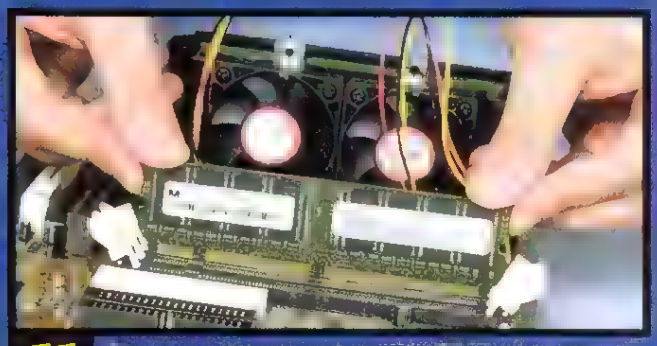
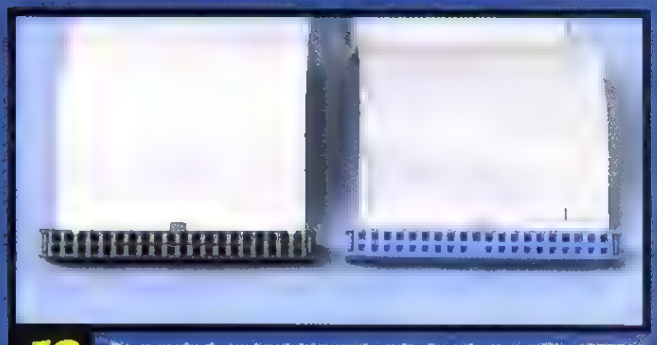


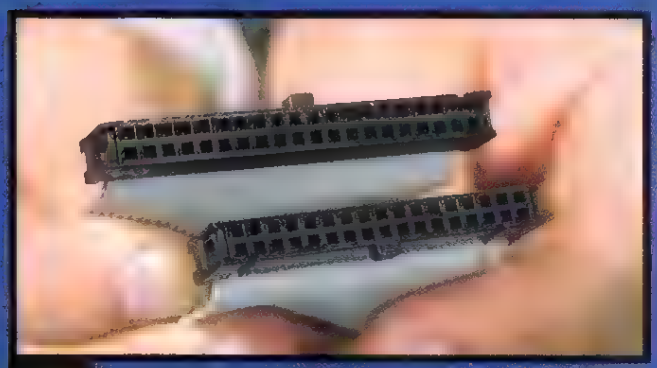
11 Now is a good time to install your 128MB PC-100 memory. Make sure that the two clips that will be holding the DIMM in place are in the "open" position before attempting to seat the memory.

12 The memory chip only fits in one way, and should be pressed straight down with a bit of force. You'll know you've done it right when the clips snap up.

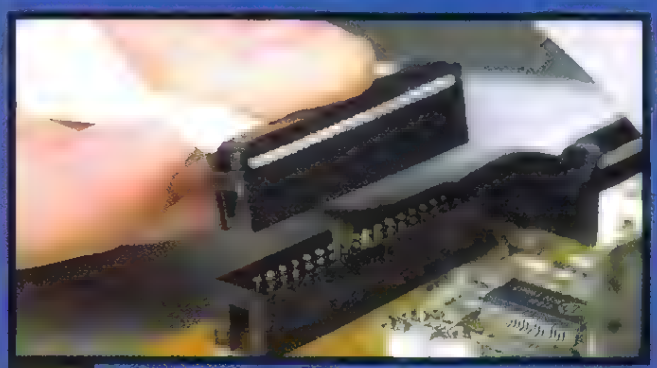


13 Because both our hard drive and motherboard support Ultra DMA/66 (a super fast IDE interface), we want to use a special cable to take advantage of this feature. The blue-tipped cable has twice as many wires as its cousin (the black-tipped cable), and only attaches to UDMA devices.

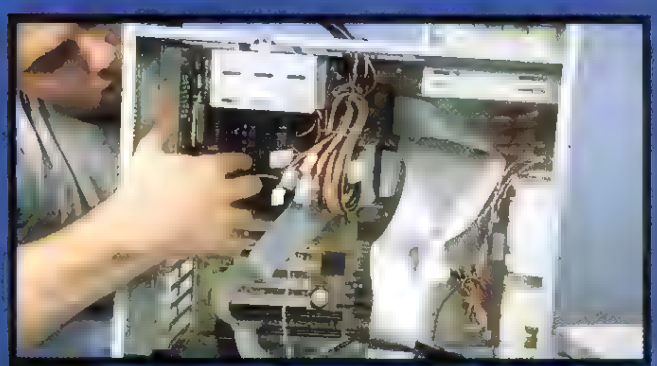
14 Plug the standard IDE cable — the one that will eventually connect to our DVD-ROM drive — into one of the two standard black IDE slots, while making certain to connect the blue end of the UDMA cable into one of the white, UDMA-enabled IDE slots.



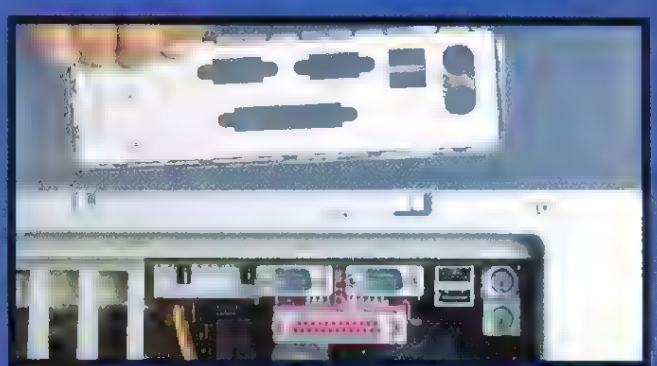
15 The first peripheral cable that needs to be connected to the motherboard is the one that goes from the motherboard to the floppy drive.



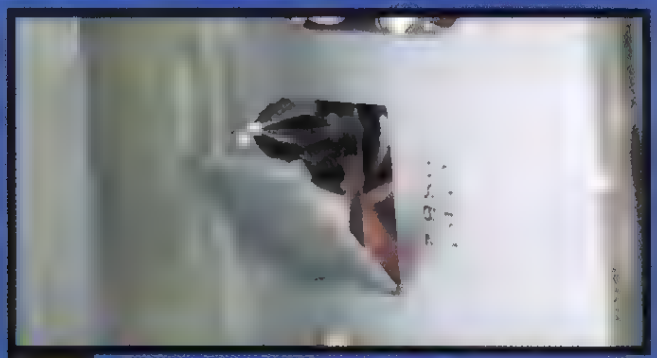
16 It's smaller and has more pins than either of the IDE cables, and like all newer ribbon cables, it comes with a small nub on one side so it can only fit into the motherboard and floppy drive one way.



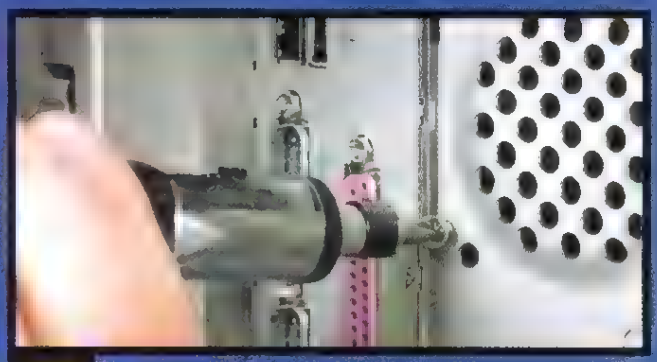
17 We've attached everything we want to on the motherboard for now. It's time to put the motherboard tray back into the case.



18 Your case is going to come with several of these metal plates that fit over the rear of the computer once the motherboard is installed. Make certain you use the proper one for your motherboard.



19 You may have to poke out some of the holes on the plate once you find it. All you need to do this is your screwdriver; just give the [illegible] a little poke, and then bend it back and forth until it comes out.

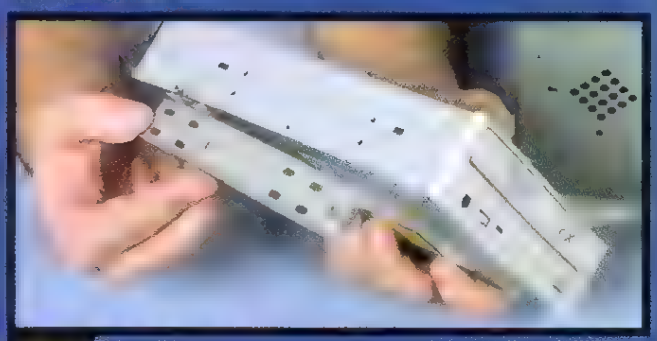


20 Once you've got the correct plate in place, you only need one small screw to secure it (Please note: picture 19 was turned on its side due to size constraints).

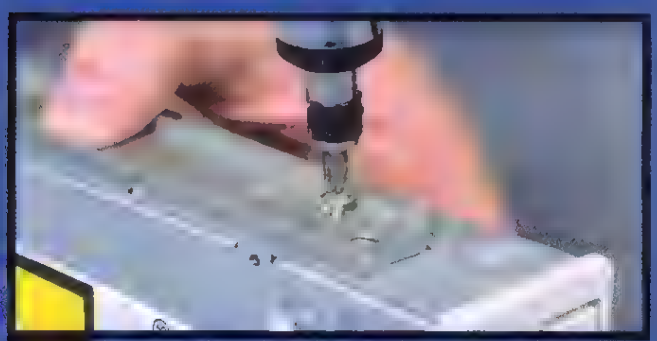
21 Now, let's start connecting the case to the motherboard. This step is required in order for your power buttons, lights, reset switch, and fan function.

22 Each of these small cables can be identified by the writing on its connector. The cables then connect to the corresponding prongs on the motherboard. This step can be a bit confusing, so you may have to experiment a bit to get it right. Don't worry too much if you plug something in wrong — the worst that's likely to happen is that your computer won't turn on until the cable is plugged in properly.

23 Next, plug in any extra fans you might have installed in your case. There are many power cables coming out of the case's power supply, so just pick any one that fits and doesn't get in the way of your work area.



24 Now it's time to mount our DVD-ROM drive. To fit into the Addronics case, you must first install one of these metal rails to either side of the drive.



25 Because our case has a snap-on faceplate, install the rails so that the front of the DVD-ROM drive sticks out approximately one inch once it's installed (see step 28 for a picture of what this looks like). Don't tighten the rails down until you've gotten the distance right.

26 This is a great time to connect the CD-audio cable to the back of the DVD-ROM drive. There are several different types of these cables, but in our situation, the one that comes with the SBLive! card is the right one. The other end of this cable plugs into the sound card and is needed for you to hear CD-audio.

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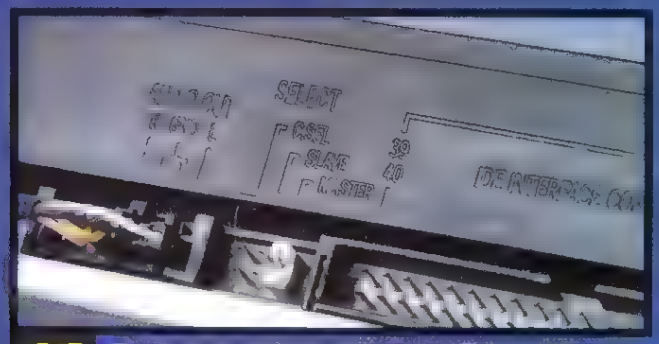
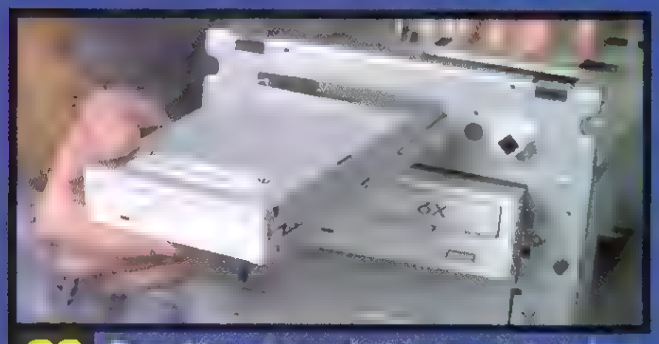
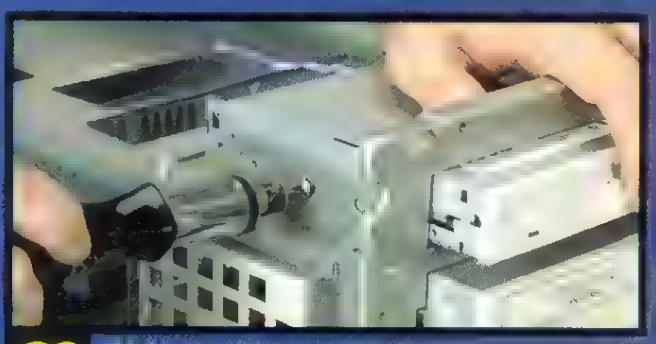


27 Your motherboard either supports four up to four IDE devices — two "Masters" and two "Slaves." Since we're setting up our hard drive as a master device, and we're using a different cable to connect the DVD-ROM drive, we want to set our DVD-ROM drive as a "Master" on the second IDE channel.

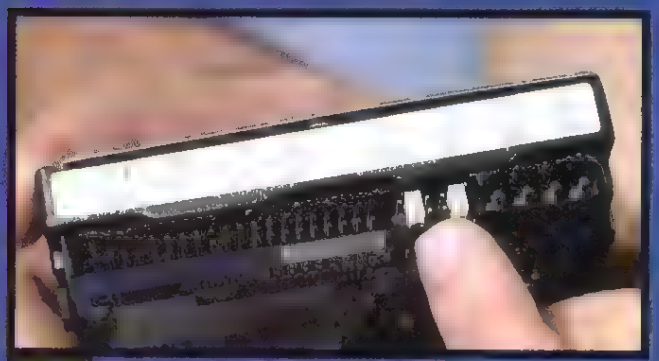
28 Once the audio cable is connected, and the jumper is set to "Master," you're ready to slide the drive into the case and secure it in. It may might seem a bit of a pain to start with, but if you swap drives often, they make the process much faster.



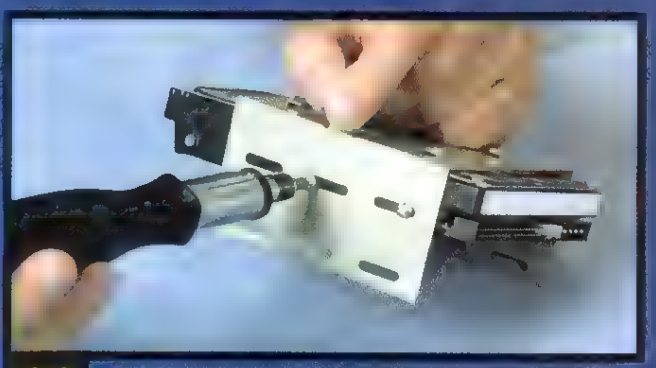
29 The top of the case is covered with two screws in front and two in the rear. This is important because you'll need to unscrew and remove one end of the case to get at where the floppy drive attaches.



30 This drive is much easier to connect to the lower bays like the DVD-ROM drive. Just line it up so that it is sticking out just as far as the DVD-ROM drive and screw it in — no rails needed.

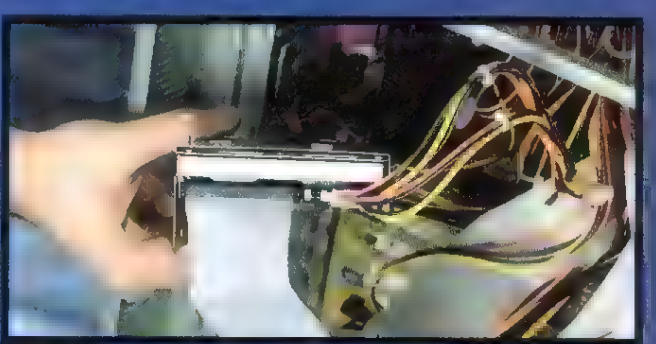


31 Now we get to the hard drive. Like I mentioned earlier, we're setting the drive up as a "Master," so make sure that the jumpers are set as such. They're almost always set this way straight from the factory.



32 The hard drive mounts in a separate, partial housing, and should be attached so that the drive's connectors face towards the front of the computer.

33 With you've screwed the drive in, all you need to do is secure the housing back into the case. Make sure that the drive is secured in such a way that it doesn't get in the way of anything.



34 Now that the drives are all installed, let's start plugging them in. Here you can see that the black end of the UDMA66 cable is plugged into the hard drive along with a power cable from the case's power supply. Now's the time to plug in the DVD-ROM's IDE and power cables, too.

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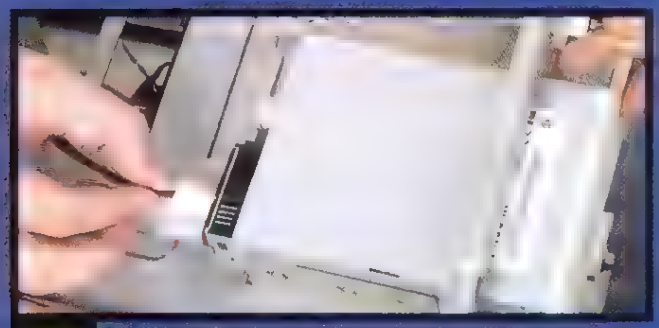
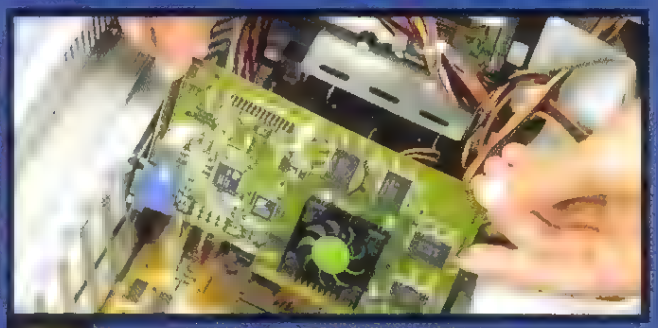
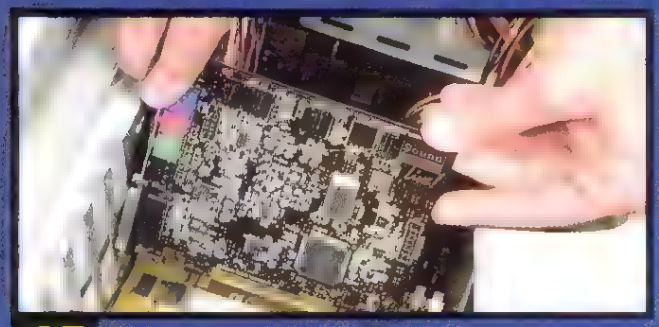


35 The cables for the floppy should be connected now, as well. Notice how the power cable for the floppy drive is a bit smaller than the ones for the DVD-ROM and hard drives? There are fewer of them coming from the case's power supply, but you'll find one.

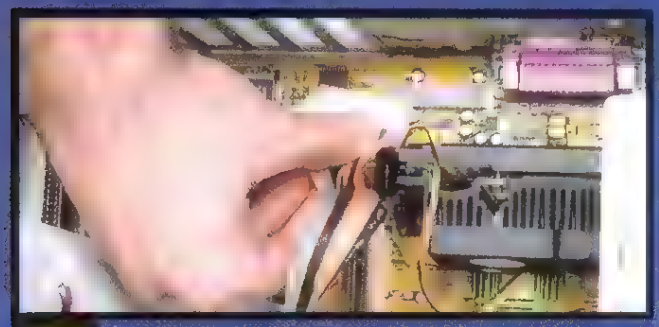


36 We're into the final stretch. Install your video card by pressing it straight down into the AGP slot. You'll know it's all the way in when the overlapping portion of the video card's face plate is flush with the corresponding screw hole in the case.



37 Do the same with the rest of the cards, only put them in the white PCI slots (since the rest of our card are all PCI-based).

38 Once the sound card is installed, connect the audio cable coming from the DVD-ROM drive into the "Audio-in" plug on the SBLive!

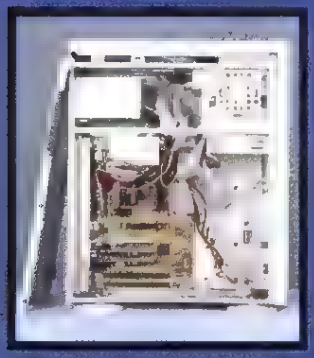


39 Now, for the second to last step, connect the power supply to the motherboard with the power cable made just for this purpose (don't worry, you couldn't have used this cable anywhere else). This cable can only go in one way, so once again, you won't be able to put it wrong.

40 The last step! To be able to watch DVD movies using your hardware decoder, you need to connect it, externally, to your video card. Once you do this, your monitor will then plug into the decoder board instead of the video card.

HOLY COW! THAT'S IT!

You've just built yourself a new computer! Congratulations!



SO...NOW WHAT DO I DO, GREG?

Once everything is plugged in and ready to go, plug in your monitor, mouse, keyboard, and power cable, and fire that baby up! Prior to installing your OS (preferably Win98), you're going to need to access your motherboard's BIOS and set a couple of things up. Assuming you've plugged everything in properly, hit the power button, and you'll hear a single "beep" from your PC speaker signalling that all is well, and then you'll see some text pop up on-screen. Right around that time, you'll see a message that says "Hit 'DEL' to enter setup." Do that, and you'll then be taken to the BIOS screen. From there, scroll down to "!! CPU SOFT MENU!!" and hit the "Enter" key. Once there, make certain that your CPU speed and voltage are set properly (set the voltage to CPU DEFAULT). Next, exit that screen and go to "IDE HARD DISK," and let the BIOS find your HD. When done, save and exit, and install Win98.

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Write us a witty (and preferably family-oriented) caption for this picture of me and the computer I've built, and if yours is the best submission I receive, I will give the PC that is complete with digital images. Send your entries to: Greg Vederman, Imagine Media, PC Gamer, 150 North Hill Dr., Brisbane, CA 94005.

One entry total per individual. All entries must be received no later than December 31, 1999, with the winner being announced on or around January 10, 2000. The editors of *PC Gamer* will be the judges and their decision is final. All prizes will be awarded and no substitutes, monetary or cashless, will be awarded. Prizes sent by winners will be awarded to their parents or legal guardians. Imagine Media is not responsible for damages or expenses that the winners might incur as a result of The HS Cutline Contest or the receipt of a prize, and winners are responsible for income taxes levied on the value of the prize received. A list of winners may also be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Imagine Media, Inc., 150 N. Hill Dr., Brisbane, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005. This contest is limited to residents of the United States. No purchase necessary. Void in Delaware, Maryland, Vermont, Puerto Rico, and where prohibited by law.

Everybody wants a fast gaming computer, but what are you supposed to do if money is tight — or, on the flip side, if you've got money to burn? Are you supposed to go to your local computer super store and buy, of all things, a retail machine? Heck no! Each month, the Trinity Page will list the parts we recommend for low, mid, and high-end budgets. The prices printed here are from Internet resellers, and at press time, are the best deals around (check out *pricewatch.com* for current info). Depending on where you shop, you may find these items for more or less.

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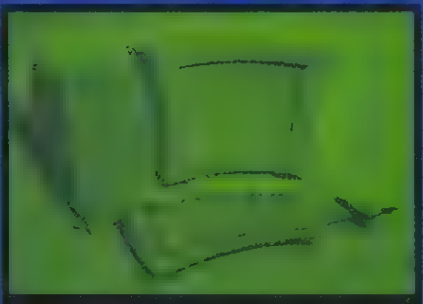
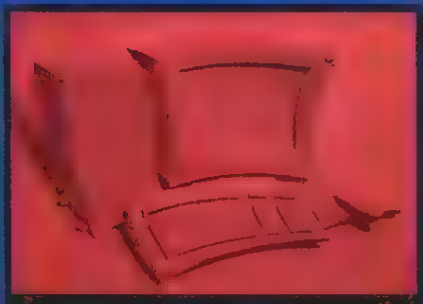
USB MOUSE: Logitech or Microsoft	$39
TOTAL: $1,081	



MID-RANGE SYSTEM

PRICE: ROUGHLY $1,800

CASE: Antec	$100
PROCESSOR: Intel PIII 550E	$225
or AMD Athlon 550	$225
MOTHERBOARD: Abit BE6-II	$106
For Athlon: FIC SD-11	$155
MEMORY: 128MB PC-100 SDRAM	$181
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM: Creative 6X DVD with Dxr3	$169
FLOPPY DRIVE: Samsung 3.5" 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE: 13.6GB Maxtor Diamond Ultra 66 EIDE	$135
SOUND CARD: Creative SB Live! Value	$46
MODEM: Diamond SupraMax 56k PCI	$48
MONITOR: 17" Optiquest Q71	$343
VIDEO CARD: Diamond Viper V770 Ultra	$151
JOYSTICK: Logitech WingMan Digital Pro	$17
GAMEPAD: Logitech WingMan Gamepad	$23
SPEAKERS: Cambridge SoundWorks FPS 1000	$79
KEYBOARD: Keytronics	$15
USB MOUSE: Logitech or Microsoft	$39
TOTALS: Intel PIII-based: $1,770	
AMD Athlon-based: $1,819	



HIGH-END SYSTEM

PRICE: ROUGHLY $3,000

CASE: Antec	$100
PROCESSOR: Intel PIII 550E	$577
or AMD Athlon 550	$358
MOTHERBOARD: Abit BE6-II	$106
For Athlon: FIC SD-11	$155
MEMORY: 256MB PC-100 SDRAM	$301
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM: Creative 6X DVD with Dxr3	$169
FLOPPY DRIVE: Samsung 3.5" 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE: 27.3GB Maxtor Diamond Ultra 66 EIDE	$225
SOUND CARD: Creative SB Live! Value	$46
MODEM: 3Com U.S. Robotics 56k PCI	$36
MONITOR: 19" Sony GDM-F500R	$343
VIDEO CARD: Diamond Viper V770 Ultra based card	$250-300
ADD-ON 3D: Creative SB Live! Platinum	$70
JOYSTICK: Saitek X36 Precision Flight System	$60
GAMEPAD: Logitech WingMan Gamepad	$23
SPEAKERS: Klipsch ProMedia 5.1	$249
KEYBOARD: Microsoft Natural Keyboard	$35
USB MOUSE: Logitech MouseMan IntelliEye technology	$55
TOTALS: Intel PIII-based: $2,730	
AMD Athlon-based: $3,060	

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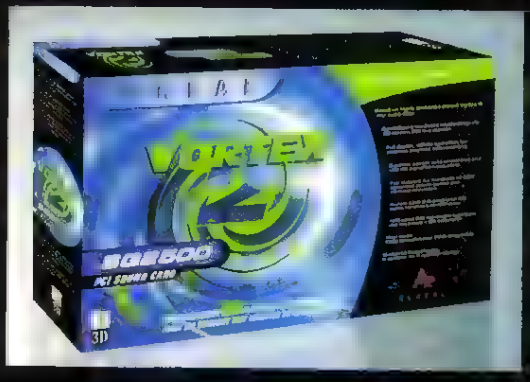

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ALIENWARE

MICROSOFT

SideWinder Dual Strike

COMPANY
Microsoft,
(425) 882-8080,
www.microsoft.com/sidewinder

PRICE
$49 *(M.S.R.P.)*

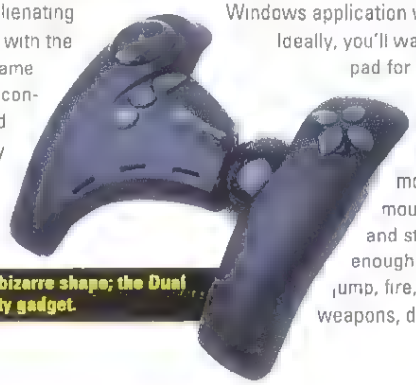
OTHER OPTIONS

While there are other first- and third-person controllers on the market, none of them work as well as a standard mouse and keyboard. If you are just getting into gaming, you might want to try using the tools you've already got before spending any extra cash on a gimmicky controller.

We survived the SpaceOrb, and we kinda liked the Panther XL — but after being assaulted with the Frag Master and the Titans Sphere, our spirits were hopelessly shattered. So, when we heard that Microsoft was trying to throw its weight around in the first-person controller ring, we nearly went mad.

The "Controller Formerly Known As Zulu" has finally arrived, and its official name is an unpronounceable symbol — uh, sorry. It's actually called the SideWinder Dual Strike, and it has the same ingenious-yet-alienating flavor as that "Artist" with the wacky symbol for a name.

The Dual Strike consists of two contoured handles connected by a rotating coupling similar to a ball-and-socket joint. The left side houses a thumb-controlled eight-way D-pad, two thumb buttons, and Microsoft's ever-present shift button. The right side sports four additional thumb buttons and each side has a trigger.



Don't be misled by its bizarre shape; the Dual Strike is actually a nifty gadget.

This USB controller doesn't act as a joystick at all, emulating instead an FPS-friendly mouse/keyboard combo. The buttons can be mapped to keystrokes through Microsoft's SideWinder software. Rotating the device (by holding one side steady and moving the other in any direction) acts as a mouse; in fact, you can control the mouse cursor in any Windows application with it.

Ideally, you'll want to use the D-pad for movement (forward, backward, and strafing), and the rotational movement for mouse-style aiming and steering. There are enough buttons to cover jump, fire, change weapons, duck, and other various in-game functions, as well.

The Dual Strike takes a few *hours* of play to get used to. The biggest problem we encountered is that three buttons are next to the D-pad, forcing you to take your thumb off of the movement controller to use them — leaving you at a standstill. That's okay in single-player games, but to stop moving in a deathmatch situation is suicide.

The SideWinder Dual Strike is a worthy FPS controller, comparable in quality and intuitiveness to the Panther XL. That said, we here at *PC Gamer* still prefer our mice and keyboards.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Emulates mouse and keyboard control in first-person shooters fairly well; easy to program; comfy shape.

LOWS Some buttons can't be reached while using directional control; hard to get used to.

BOTTOM LINE The Dual Strike isn't as tacky as some FPS controllers, but we'll stick with our trusty mouse and keyboard.

MICROSOFT

SideWinder Game Pad Pro

COMPANY
Microsoft
(425) 882-8080,
www.microsoft.com/sidewinder

PRICE
$49 *(M.S.R.P.)*

OTHER OPTIONS

If you're looking for a great gamepad, pick up the original SideWinder Gamepad (above) (*www.microsoft.com/sidewinder*), a Logitech WingMan Extreme (*www.logitech.com*), or a Gravis Xterminator (*www.gravis.com*) — we'd pick any one of them over MS's latest pad.

Microsoft's original SideWinder game pad is still a favorite among countless gamers. It was the first PC gamepad with truly comfortable grips, and it made hot-seat multiplayer gaming with full controller functionality as easy as chaining up to four pads together. Basically, the SideWinder ain't broke.

Nevertheless, Microsoft keeps trying to fix it. The first follow-up was the gimmicky, tilt-sensitive FreeStyle Pro, whose unwieldy handles don't compare with the SideWinder's sensual grips. Now we have the SideWinder Game Pad Pro that looks a lot better on paper than the satisfaction you get from using the final product.

On the positive side, its USB interface makes short work of getting the Game Pad Pro up and running, and it comes with the latest version of Microsoft's intuitive programming software. Six thumb buttons and two triggers provide plenty of buttons to program, and Microsoft's trademark "shift" button doubles their functionality (but does anyone really use it?).

From the SideWinder game pad, to the FreeStyle Pro, to this: Microsoft's game pad line gets more disappointing with each generation.

What sets this SideWinder apart from the masses is this: the D-pad does double duty as a both a traditional, eight-way digital device and as a proportional analog controller. This trick has been done before, though, and with more intuitive results. Dating as far back as InterAct's Mako pad, digital/analog gamepads have become the norm for consoles and many PC pads have been following suit. They usually have two thumb pads, one for each type of control. The Game Pad Pro uses the same pad for both digital and analog control, and it requires you to toggle between the two through the software interface. That's frustratingly inconvenient when you want to change modes within a game.

We found the pad to be too smooth as well, causing thumb slippage that must be countered by added pressure, which in turn causes thumb fatigue. Tactilely, the pad feels mushy and unresponsive. The grips are set at too wide an angle, which caused some soreness near our pinky fingers. Overall, the SideWinder Game Pad Pro is an inconvenient, unwelcome addition to the SideWinder line.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Offers analog and digital control; lots of buttons, sleek look.

LOWS Mushy D-pad, grip is too wide; switching between analog and digital requires you to do it through software.

BOTTOM LINE This surprising disappointment pales in comparison to Microsoft's original SideWinder design. We'll wait for something better.

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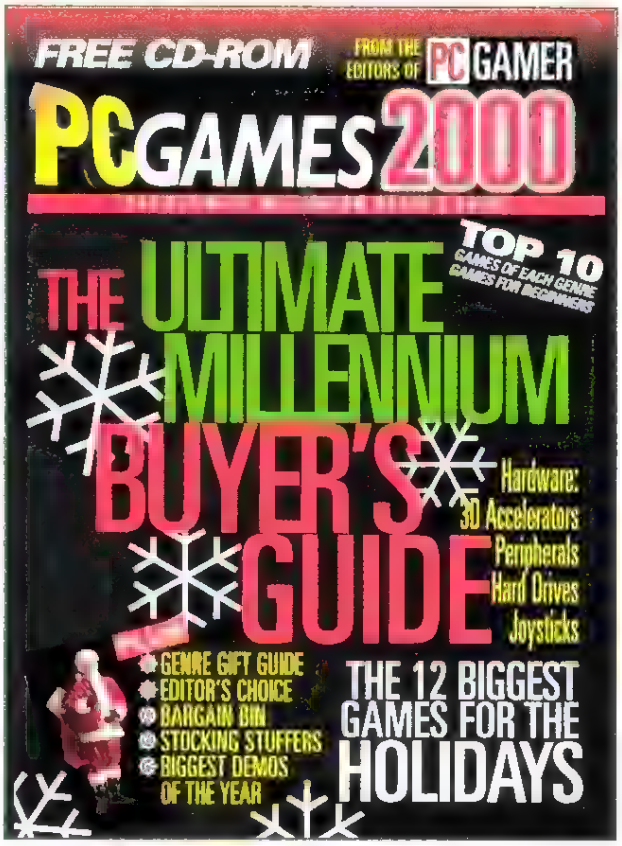

The buying guide that you usually find in the December issue of *PC Gamer* will now be available as a full-size magazine. That means more great articles, more pictures and more advice about what's hot this season for PC gamers from your favorite editors.

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www.falcon-nw.com

PRICE
$4,299 *(as configured)*

SYSTEM SPECS

SYSTEM
Processor: 700MHz AMD Athlon
Motherboard: Asus K7M
Memory: 256MB PC-100 SDRAM RAM

STORAGE
Hard Drive: 27.3GB Western Digital, 7200 RPM ATA66
DVD-ROM: Toshiba 4th Generation DVD Drive
Zip Drive: 100MB Internal Iomega Zip Drive

EXPANSION
Internal 5.25" bays: 3 (1 used)
External 5.25" bays: 3 (1 used)
Internal 3.5" bays: 5 (2 used)
External 3.5" bays: 2 (2 used)
Bus Slots: 1 AGP (full), 4 PCI (3 used), 1 shared ISA/PCI (free)
RAM: 3 DIMM sockets (2 used)

VIDEO
Primary Display Adapter: 32MB Guillemot 3D Prophet (GeForce 256)
Monitor: 19" Optiquest V95

AUDIO
Sound Card: Diamond MX300
Speakers: Cambridge SoundWorks 5.1 digital speakers

OTHER
Network: D-Link Ethernet 10/100 Base-T card
DVD decoding: REALmagic Hollywood Plus+
Mousing Surface: Black EverGlide Attack Pad w/Falcon logo printed on it

OTHER OPTIONS

Other than Falcon Northwest, there's really only one other system builder that's on the same level, and that company is Alienware. If you want to do some shopping around before you buy, you might want to head over to Alienware's site to see what they've got cookin'.

ALIENWARE:
(800) 494-3382,
www.alienware-pc.com

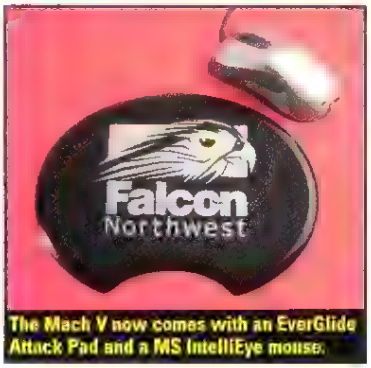
Falcon mixes one part Athlon with one part GeForce to yield the fastest Mach V yet.

The best things in life aren't cheap. Even with the recent price plunges we've seen for relatively powerful systems, you're still going to have to cough up the dough if you want to have a system worth bragging about. Here's where Falcon Northwest comes in. As the founder and owner of the company, Kelt Reeves' plan from day one was to build *the* fastest gaming PCs on the planet with *the* best hardware available.

The early ads that Falcon used to run in *PC Gamer* had a picture of Kelt standing next to one of his machines with a quote that said something along the lines of: "Ever try playing your games with their maximum recommended system requirements?" Hell, at the time those ads were running, most of us gamers were struggling just to keep our heads inches above the minimum requirements, let alone the max! When technical editor Greg Vederman was still in college, he used to pick up copies of *PC Gamer*, flip to the monthly Falcon ad, and dream that someday, when he had a real job, he'd be able to afford a Mach V. Of course, now that he does have a real job, he's resigned himself to waiting for the death of a wealthy relative so he can afford one.

As expensive as the Mach V is, it isn't overpriced when you consider what's under the hood. Keep in mind — Falcon is all about building its systems with the fastest hardware it can get its hands on. As we go to press, a 700MHz Athlon (formerly K7) costs upward of $900 just by itself (and even then you'll have to shop around a bit to find it at that good of a price), not to mention Guillemot's 3D Prophet that retails for $289. So as you can see, things really start adding up in very short order when you set out to use the newest parts on the market.

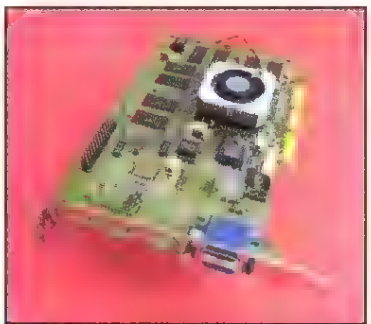
Although we tested an Athlon system back in the October issue of *PC Gamer*, it was only for a preview since the system itself was built by AMD, was super optimized for 3DMark 99 MAX Pro, and was never intended to be sold. What that system did, though, was help us prepare us for our task at hand: reviewing the fastest damn computer we've ever gotten our grimy hands on.



The Mach V now comes with an EverGlide Attack Pad and a MS IntelliEye mouse.

The Athlon and Prophet are at the heart of what makes this computer scream. Let's talk about the Athlon a bit first. As much as AMD has been claiming for years that it was putting out processors that were every bit as fast, if not faster than, anything Intel was producing, real world benchmark scores never really bared that out. It was true that in some cases, a chip like the K6-2/3 could beat out a similarly clocked Celeron or Pentium II in certain games made to run with AMD's 3DNOW! instructions (which allow multiple 3D-enhancing math calculations to be carried out simultaneously), but in games that weren't optimized, AMD's performance lagged.

All that changes now with the Athlon. Even without any in-game optimization, Athlons tend to be faster than PIIIs at the same clock speed. Not only that, but AMD seems to be getting its chips to market sooner than Intel. As we go to press, the 700MHz Athlon has been available for a week, while Intel is playing catch-up at 600MHz. Finally, after years of trying, it seems that AMD finally has the processor technology it needs to give Intel a serious run for its money.


The GeForce card that initially came our way wasn't quite ready for prime time.

Of course, what's a fast processor without a fast video card? To that end, the new Mach V is the first PC we've seen to pack the power of NVIDIA's latest powerhouse, the GeForce 256. Previewed back in November, the GeForce is looking like it could change the face of PC gaming forever. Instead of just being a faster version of existing NVIDIA technology, the GeForce is the first consumer-level video card to take advantage of what is known as a T&L engine. T&L (transform and lighting) are the last two remaining steps in the 3D pipeline to be taken away from your CPU and on to your video card. What's the benefit, you ask? Well, both OpenGL and DirectX 7 support hardware-based T&L engines. If a game is written under either of these two APIs, and the developer decides to use this function, your CPU is free to do more exciting things like concentrate more on a game's artificial intelligence and physics. This also means that if your GeForce is running on a lower-end processor with a T&L-enabled game, you'll get very comparable frame rates as compared with someone with a much faster CPU. Think of the GeForce as a PlayStation 2, but *in* your computer; games made to run on it will perform just about as well on your system as on anyone else's, pretty much independent of what other components you have.

Until games start popping up with this support, however, the GeForce (in this case, Guillemot's 32MB 3D Prophet) will still be CPU dependent, so having the most powerful processor is still of utmost importance. Unfortunately, the 3D Prophet's drivers we had to use for this review still aren't finalized. Because of this, it's hard to say how much faster the GeForce really

If there's one thing besides speed that Falcon has always been good at, it's keeping everything neat inside the case.

Ironically, this could be Falcon's least extravagant system to date. That's okay...we can live without the $800 speakers that Falcon shipped with its last Mach V!

is when running existing games, relative to the other 3D chips on the market. Right now it would appear that it's as much as 10 to 15 percent faster than the fastest TNT2 Ultras, but we'll know better next month when we've got final software for both the 3D Prophet and, hopefully, Creative Labs' GeForce-powered card. All we can say for sure right now is that the combination of the 3D Prophet and the 700MHz Athlon, make this Falcon Mach V the fastest PC we've ever tested – both in 3D gaming and all around Windows performance.

Speed alone doesn't make for an automatic Editors' Choice award when it comes to computer systems, though, solid construction and good peripheral decisions play important roles, as well. As we've come to expect of a Falcon system, construction is top-notch. The inside of the case is very clean and organized, and there is sufficient airflow to keep everything running cool. In addition, Falcon not only labels all the ports on the back of the computer for easy setup, but it also ships every system with a three-ring binder filled with information about your exact computer, the price you paid, and all the tests that were run prior to it leaving the factory. There's even several pages dedicated to telling you how to best keep your system running well, as well as a listing of the all the companies that have components in the Mach V, along with their web addresses and phone numbers.

Notice how every port on the Mach V is labeled for easy setup.

As for the rest of the components and peripherals that ship with the Mach V, just about everything is exactly what we'd hope for. Up until recently, Falcon was one of the few remaining companies out there really pushing SCSI. We've never been huge fans of SCSI due to its increased cost and complexity when compared to the nominal speed gains over newer iterations of IDE. While Falcon still offers SCSI-based systems, we were pleased to see that the Mach V we received had Ultra DMA66-based drives. These speed-burners are nearly as fast as SCSI, but cost less, don't require an additional PCI slot for a SCSI adapter card, and don't limit you to having to buy one of the relatively few boards with SCSI adapters built-in.

Falcon also scores for including the excellent Diamond MX300 along with a set of Cambridge SoundWorks sweet-sounding five-piece digital speaker system. For DVD playback, Falcon even includes the amazing REALmagic Hollywood Plus+ card with its best-of-class output quality.

As seems to be the case with every product under the sun, even this system isn't perfect. We found a problem with the USB ports where occasionally the computer would either forget that a USB mouse was plugged in at boot up (forcing a reboot to get it recognized) or it would just occasionally lock up while moving the pointer around the screen. Falcon says that the motherboard manufacturer, Asus, is aware of the problem and that it will be fixed with the release of an updated version of the motherboard, which should be available by the time you're reading this.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Takes both the fastest processor and the fastest video card ever made and puts them in one system; solid construction.

LOWS Motherboard has some issues with its USB ports.

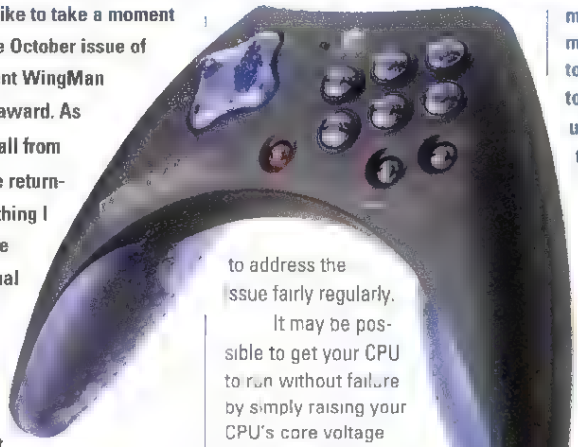
BOTTOM LINE If you want a computer that'll make having to read a game's system recommendations moot for the foreseeable future, Falcon has got the system for you.

BENCH MARKS

It's time once again to "experience" The Greg

Before we get to Dear Greg this month, I'd like to take a moment to address a slight misunderstanding. In the October issue of the Hard Stuff, I reviewed Logitech's excellent WingMan Extreme Gamepad and even gave it an Editors' Choice award. As you might imagine, I was very surprised to then get a call from representatives at Logitech telling me that people were returning their WingMan Extreme Gamepads based on something I had said in that review. Apparently, it had to do with the fact that I mentioned an old D-pad problem in the original WingMan Gamepad that made some of the early pads in that line nearly unusable. That said, the problem I was talking about was very obvious — either your D-pad worked properly or it didn't. It wasn't anything that would ever break later down the road. If you've got an original WingMan Gamepad and it's working normally, for God's sake man, keep it — it's a fantastic pad! Also, the Extreme *never* had any problems in the first place; so if you've got one of them, cool your ramjets, bub! You've got one of the best gamepads on the market.

Ah, I'm glad I got that off my chest. So, without further ado, we move on to this month's installment of Dear Greg!



Q My girlfriend rocks, and so does my love life. But my computer sucks. A few months ago, when I first put it together and booted it up, I got an error message telling me that Explorer had crashed. For a while, this happened only occasionally, but then it got to the point that I had to restart the computer two or three times to get it running without a crash at startup. Reformatting my drive and reinstalling all my software seemed to solve this problem for nearly two months, but now I'm beginning to get strange error messages again. My computer is a Celeron 300A overclocked to 450MHz on an A-bit BH6 motherboard. Other pertinent items include a Canopus TNT video card and a Diamond Vortex 90 soundcard.

—TREY, VIA THE INTERNET

A Trey, I noticed that you mentioned that your girlfriend rocks and your computer sucks. Though I'm tempted to work my magic and move a couple of your words around as I'm certain you intended, *PC Gamer* is a family publication, and I'll have you know that I for one am downright offended that you'd set out to goad me into profanity!

As to your problem, while it's odd that the error messages went away for such a long while after reformatting your hard drive, it sounds like you've got a fairly clear-cut case of overclocking failure. I get a lot of E-mails like this every month, and so I think it's important to address the issue fairly regularly.

It may be possible to get your CPU to run without failure by simply raising your CPU's core voltage. The Celeron 300A defaults in your BIOS to 2.0 volts. If you haven't done so already, you may want to try going in and cranking it up a bit. You should be able to go as high as 2.3 volts assuming you have good cooling in your system, but I wouldn't recommend going any higher even if your motherboard allows you to. The risk of meltdown gets too great above that point. If that doesn't work and you're still crashing, try going back down to 2.0 volts and dropping your bus speed down from 100MHz to 83MHz. From there, raise your voltage back up in small increments until your system is stable. Also, depending on what damage you may have done to your Windows files, you may need to reformat one last time before you're done.

NEED HELP?

If you have a hardware question or comment, or a personal problem, write to:

Greg Vederman,
Hard Stuff, PC Gamer
[illegible] North Hill Drive
Brisbane, CA [illegible]

or E-mail:
[illegible]@[illegible].com

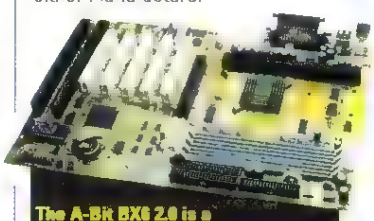
Q My personal problem is with you. Are you aware of just how ridiculous the whole "Dear Greg" concept is?

Anyway, I just upgraded my system to a PIII 450MHz processor with an Amptron motherboard and a Voodoo3 3000 AGP card. Since doing so, the computer just shuts down at random times when I'm playing games for no apparent reason. When this happens, the monitor goes into power saving mode, and the computer appears to be on. There's no way, however, to get anything back on screen unless I shut the system down all the way, and then restart it. What's going on here?

—STEVE BELANGER, VIA THE INTERNET

A Yes Steve, I am becoming more aware of just how ridiculous "Dear Greg" is on a daily basis. While I've gotten a ton of E-mail from people saying they love it, I've gotten just as many from people telling me just how much of an idiot they think I really am. *(Obviously from our more intelligent and perceptive readers — Ed.)* That said, the whole "Dear Greg" concept will be changing a bit next month, and I think the adjustment will make everyone — the fans and the nay-sayers — very happy.

Unfortunately Steve, it would appear that you've purchased a motherboard that isn't entirely up to spec in regards to its AGP slot. The slots are supposed to supply 3.3 volts, yet many manufacturers are putting out motherboards that only push around 2.8. Your video card isn't getting enough juice, and this is the cause of your problem. If you can, return your motherboard and pick a new one up from a company like Asus or A-bit, as we've never heard of anyone having this problem on boards from either manufacturer.



The A-Bit BX6 2.0 is a good example of a motherboard that doesn't have any problems with the voltage of its AGP slot.

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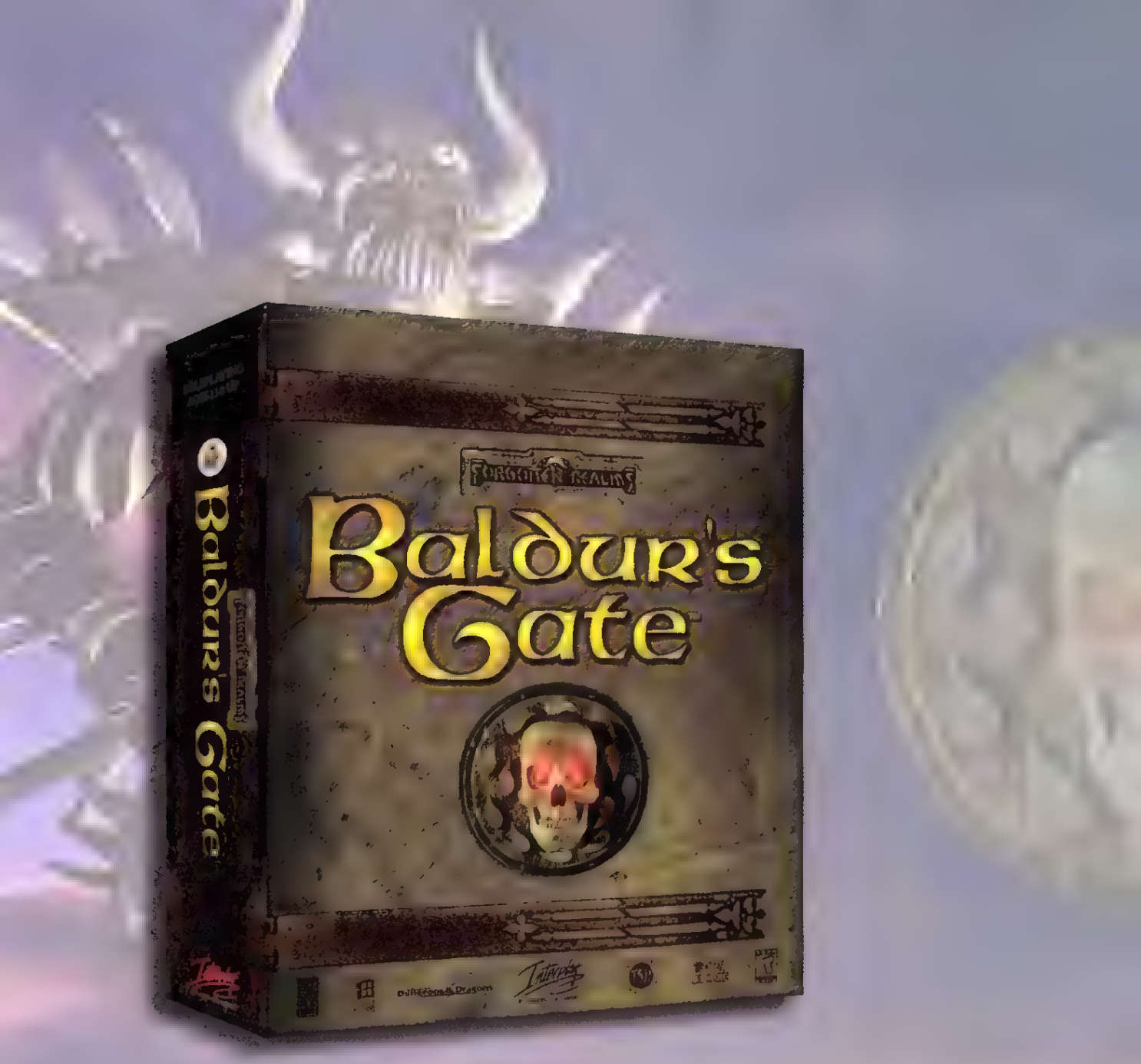

"Game of the year"

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"Best role playing game of 1998"

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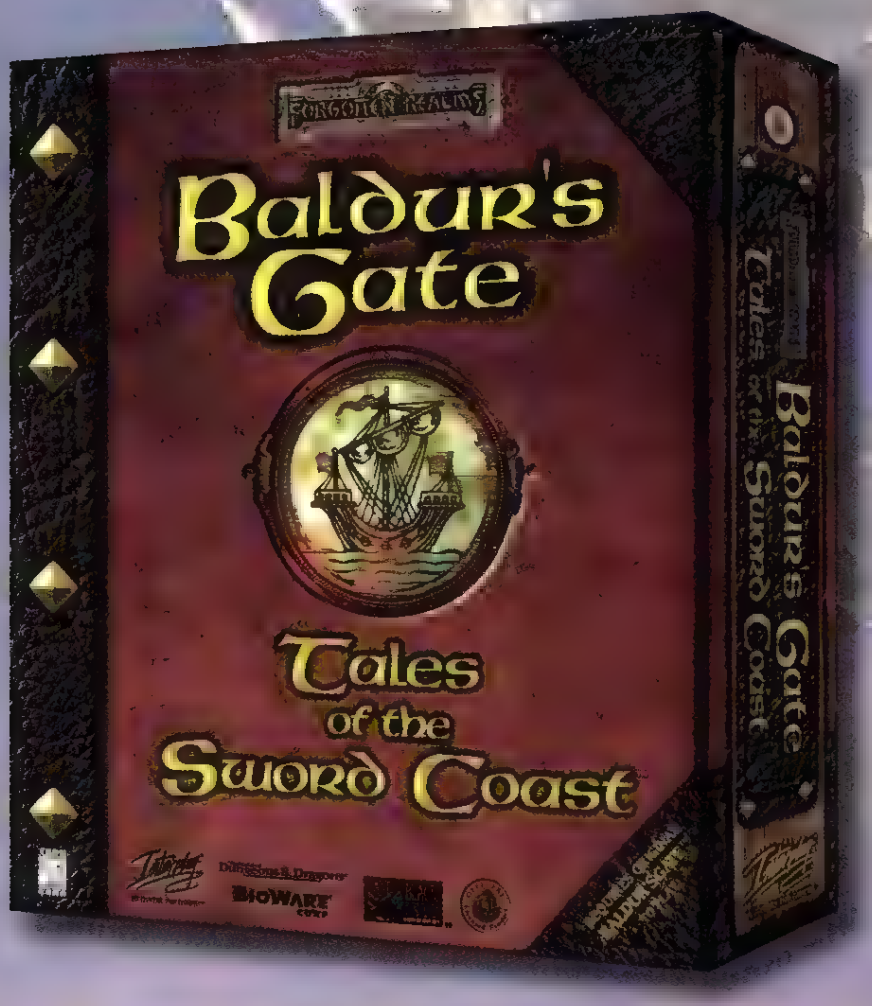
"Best role playing game, best interface, best music and best company 1998"

–The Adrenaline Vault



"Just what you want from an expansion pack: more of what you liked the first time around"

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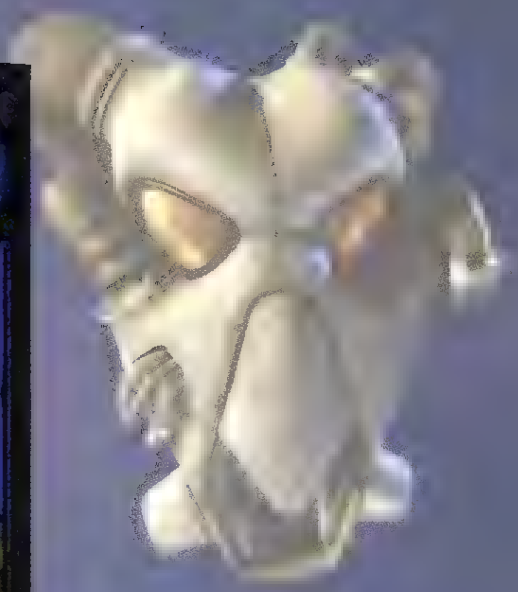
"The new depth of gameplay and the improved interface offers a unique, yet warmly familiar experience."

–The Adrenaline Vault



"Fallout 2 is undeniably entertaining. In fact, it's addictive."

–Computer Games Online/CDMAG.com

"Kingpin is far more ambitious, with realistic visuals that rival anything currently on PC's"

–Entertainment Weekly - July 1999

"It's a bold new direction in computer gaming, and one, perhaps, that many of us have been waiting for."

–PC Games - January 1999

"★★★★★"
–Next Generation

"Editors Choice Award"
–PC Gamer

"Graphics and gameplay make Descent3 the best of the series"
–Computer Gaming World

"We couldn't help but be stunned by the visuals in Starfleet Command."
–Imagine Games Network

"Starfleet Command is what the Star Trek fan is looking for in tactical combat."
–Computer Games Strategy Plus

"Great work. I loved FreeSpace 1 and am going to really enjoy FreeSpace 2. This is what I've been waiting for."

–Bazza

"I don't have enough positive adjectives to describe this game. But, I'll try it anyway! Super-ultra-mega-amazingly-awesomely-cool!!!!"

–Alphakiller

"Move over Baldur's Gate, now there's something meatier."

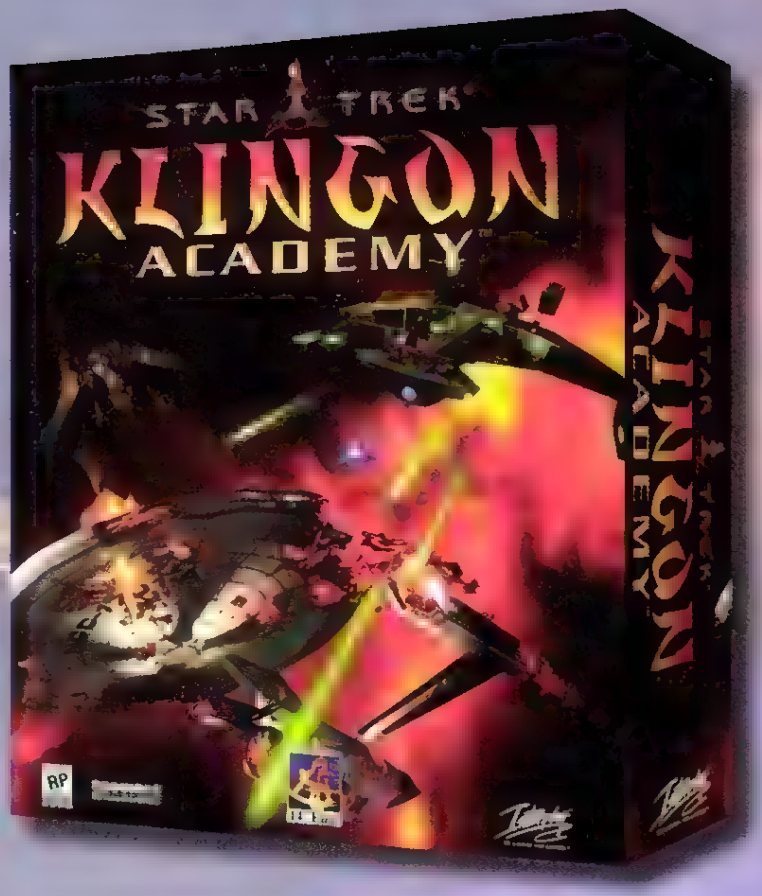
–PC Gamer

"...an innovative mix of storyline and a distinct setting that will intrigue any die hard role-playing fan."

–Future Games Network

"It (Klingon Academy) looks as if it could be the rare Star Trek game that gets it right."
–Computer Gaming World

"One thing we did see is one hell of an engine. This game (Klingon Academy) looked hot, and is easily the best looking space combat game we have seen on the PC to date, eclipsing even the latest efforts in the Wing Commander series."
–GameFan Online



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T. LIAM MCDONALD

EXTENDED PLAY

ADD-ONS · SCENARIO DISCS · UPGRADES · BUG PATCHES

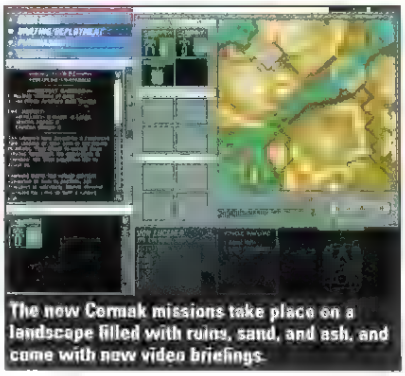
Striking Gold

MechCommander Gold lifts this initially flawed game into must-have territory, proving that sometimes the "gold" really is worth going for.

One of the best things about "Deluxe" and "Gold" editions is that they give you another chance to play games you missed the first time around. Everyone thinks being a game reviewer is all beer and skittles, but we have to play what we're told to play when we're told to play it, which doesn't leave any extra time for "fun" gaming if we want to have a silly little thing called "a life." The highest compliment among reviewers is, "I played it even though I didn't cover it."

Recently I discovered both *Independence War* and *MechCommander*, games I'd only given a passing glance the first time around, through their reissues. I wasn't assigned *MechCommander*. I had heard it was pretty buggy, and I just didn't get a chance to really dig into it. *MechCommander Gold* gave me an opportunity to rectify this and discover what is certainly one of the most sadly neglected and under-rated real-time strategy games to come down the pike in a long stretch. Most of the problems with the initial release have been addressed in *MechCommander Gold*, creating a game that improves immeasurably on many niggling points.

In most *MechCommander* coverage, reviewers extolled the game's graphics and rich mix of gameplay elements but knocked the puzzle-like missions, limited control options, and lack of difficulty settings. Missions are still hard scripted, but new difficulty levels have been added to alter AI skill levels for a more scalable challenge. An "Ace" class of pilot has been added to make the most of this new feature, but no new pilot characters have been added. Control is now far better with the addition of waypointing, including waypoint orders for jumps and mine laying. Some of the limb targeting command problems have been fixed so that pilots are more efficient, but I still find this to be an unsatisfying element of the game.



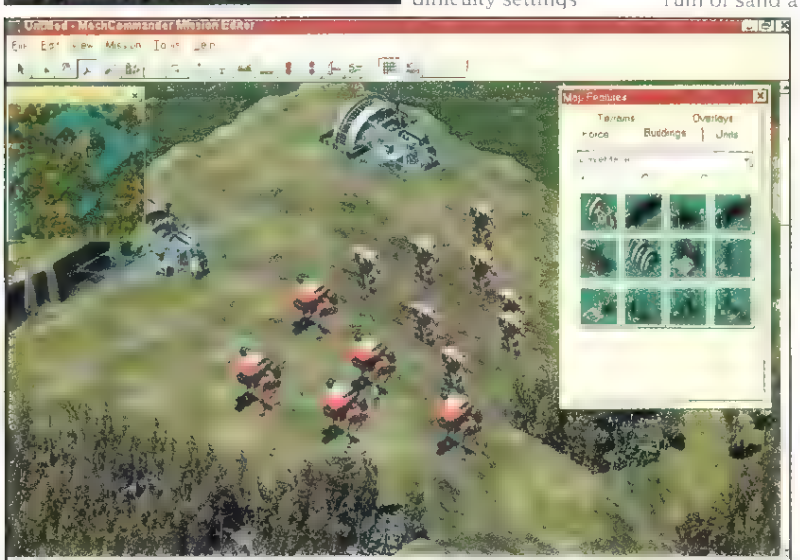
The new Cermak missions take place on a landscape filled with ruins, sand, and ash, and come with new video briefings.

Eject! Eject! Dang, I should have known better than to take a heavy up against three enemies and a phalanx of turrets....

The main attractions are the new campaign game and a complete single and multiplayer mission editor. Twelve new missions are set on the planet Cermak, a smoking ruin of sand and ash that has seen centuries of war. The campaign takes place after Operation Bulldog, but you cannot carry your pilots and mechs forward into the new scenarios. Missions provide a decent challenge, but are not the insane step up you might expect from a new campaign. The editor is an outstanding new feature that enables you to craft maps from either the Port Arthur or Cermak tile sets, or create complete stand-alone missions. There's no campaign editor, but a hack enables you to create a new campaign by replacing the current ones.

New mech chassis match some of the offerings found in *MechWarrior III*, including my favorite, the Inner Sphere Bushwacker. The light Stiletto and assault Mauler and the Clan Shadowcat (medium), Nova Cat (heavy), and Turkina (assault), are also included. The heavies are good for the new defensive missions, particularly the wave after wave of base attacks in Mission 2. I still like the Bushwacker, but I got better results in *Mech III* than my pilots are getting here. Among the eleven new weapons are six models of shotgun-style autocannon that can damage multiple areas of armor per shot, the Long Tom artillery lobber, light Gauss rifle, fast-cycling long-range laser, a guided missile launcher dubbed the Heavy Thunderbolt, and a railgun.

Online games are supported via MPlayer and MSN Gaming Zone, with the *MCG* players separated from the *MC* players. As far as I can tell, even if you want to play the original *MechCommander* content and you only own the



MechCommander Gold comes complete with an excellent new single and multiplayer map and a mission editor that's powerful and easy to use.

Gold version, you'll have to find other *Gold* owners to play against, which kind of bites. When I checked the Zone, it had a grand total of zero online players and MPlayer had less than a dozen, even though the game had been out for a week or two. Here's hoping business picks up.

There's a $10 rebate for owners of the original game, and the list price is only $30, so if you have the original you should be able to scare up a copy for about $15, which brings it down to the price of a regular add-on disc. It's definitely one you should check out, particularly if you haven't played the original. *Tiberian Sun* was off my hard drive once the review was filed, but *MechCommander Gold* will be staying on for a while.

And in Other Nudes...

I think I've found the new signifier for when a cultural icon has run its course: they make a trading card game out of it. Such is the case with Lara Croft, whose 15 minutes on the center stage of PC gaming was 14 minutes too long for me, considering. At the game was kind of a dog. EA Core and Eidos never did anything fresh with her, they just pumped out tired sequels and clones, and CI the whole notion of her as a sex symbo, was creepy in the extreme. *PC Games* magazine even printed a *centerfold* of her. And I won't even explore the whole sad subgenre of "Nude Raider" pics. It all just befuddles me. *Pokemon* is an absolute blessing by comparison, and curse Eidos for making me say that.

Now that I have that off my chest, I should point out that *Tomb Raider Starring Lara Croft: The Collectible Card Game* from Precedence is a generally well designed system with multiplayer and solitaire rules. It follows the pattern of most TCGs: character cards, location cards, and treasure cards. Cards form the level maps, and other cards are traps, monsters, and other obstacles. It's closer to *WizWars* than *Magic: The Gathering*, since the cards actually map a location. But, while the mechanics are good, the art and design are only average. Cards rely heavily on screen captures, with some tacky Lara pinup art mixed in. Compared to the high quality art used for most TCGs, these are just plain ugly. Too bad, since the gameplay is decent.

As I was wrapping up this column, the beta for the *Magic: The Gathering Interactive Encyclopedia* arrived and I was able to spend some time with it before it crashed harder than the Asian stock market. For *Magic* fans, it looks like a very sharp resource, with a complete illustrated catalog of all *Magic* cards, tools for building and analyzing decks, and a resource for cataloging collections. Buried within the menu (and the press release), I found a feature that would seem to be pretty major: the ability to build electronic decks and games via the Internet, using Wizards' web site. It wasn't functional when I tried it, but this would seem to be a pretty central feature, so I find it curious that Wizards isn't emphasizing it more. In any event, if it turns out to be functional it should be a pretty interesting alternative to MicroProse's aging *Magic* software. PCG

Wizards of the Coast's *Magic: the Gathering Interactive Encyclopedia* not only has a complete catalog of all cards ever produced, deck builders, and other utilities, but also a gateway to play *Magic* via the Internet.

While standard turrets in can be taken over and turned against the enemy, those in-ground turrets can't, making them serious obstacles.

BUG PATCHES

***DRAKAN: ORDER OF THE FLAME* build 442** (Psygnosis) An immense patch with loads of fixes and additions. Multiplayer fixes include: DirectPlay-based networking code has been replaced with Winsock (TCP/IP and UDP). Reduction of network bandwidth and smarter modem support. When joining a team, the scoreboard is now displayed. Dedicated server now works under Windows NT 4.0. Gameplay fixes include: Increased radius and damage on Blue Energy Bow explosion. Fixed Green Energy bow (DragonStrife) so that it seeks from a longer range. Decreased damage on ring of fire and lightning axe. Other fixes: Better joystick/gamepad support. 3D benchmarking feature. Autosave on entering levels. Added "nightmare" skill level.

***HOMEWORLD* v1.03** (Sierra Studios) Previously, OpenGL was not available for any of the Nvidia TNT cards under Windows9x. OpenGL is now available for Win98 but not Win95. A problem with auto-detecting firewalls was fixed.

HOMEWORLD

***KINGPIN* v1.21** (Xatrix) Fixes include: 20 percent Bandwidth reduction. Fixed spawning inside teammates.

***COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN* v1.13** (Westwood Studios) This patch corrects several bugs, as well as multiplayer and skirmish play balance issues. The rate of fire for NOD artillery is decreased, and damage is decreased by 20 percent. The power requirements of NOD SAM sites is now doubled. GDI disc throwers now explode when killed and damage any nearby units. Concrete and Firestorm walls now build like laser fences.

***MECHWARRIOR 3* v1.2** (Activision) Fixes include: The crackling and popping sounds heard on PC sound cards (such as the Sound Blaster Live! and Sound Blaster PCI 128 sound cards) have been eliminated. The Cauldron Born, Puma, Supernova, and Vulture configurations now include Double Heat Sinks instead of regular Heat Sinks. Multiplayer changes include: If you quickly type uppercase letters and question marks in the multiplayer chat window, the program no longer crashes. Weapon groupings are saved after a player dies and respawns. Enhancements include: The ability to add maps has been implemented. Multiplayer lag and packet loss have been significantly reduced. Two new multiplayer maps, Durgan City and The Spaceport, have been added.

***REVOLT* v1.1** (Acclaim) Fixes include: Command line switch /sli fixes Voodoo SLI problems. Can now select user tracks in multiplayer — run UpdateTrack.exe in editor folder to convert old user tracks to new format. Track editor tracks can now be exported double size.

***PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D* v1.1** (Mindscape) Fixes include: Collision and force issues (swimming in currents or being pushed by objects), combat and AI, and a faster look cam. Also, this patch will auto-save your game at the start of every level.

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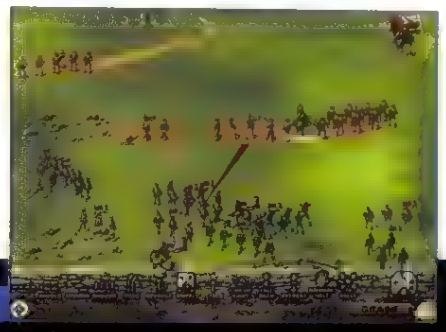

A Confederate battle line fends off a Union attack

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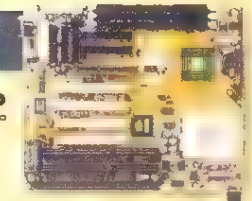

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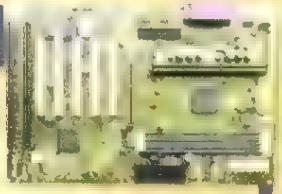

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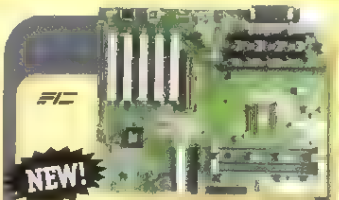

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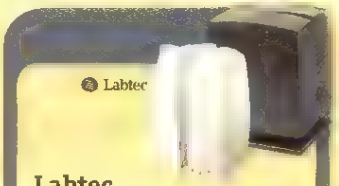

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The Last Words of a Fine Officer

Mortally wounded and fading fast, Billy offers some final thoughts on multiplayer goodness.

DM: *(into squad car radio)* We need backup! Officer down! Billy's been hit! I repeat, we have an officer down!

BH: Unhhh...ugh... Morris, is ...that you?

DM: Yeah it is, buddy. Try to hang on, okay? You're looking good. You're gonna make it.

BH: What are you talking about? There's a damn rail gun hole through my chest! I'm watching smoke spiral upward out of the wound right this very second! I'm done for.

DM: Oh, Billy...didn't I always tell you your loose cannon ways and reckless disregard for authority were going to get one of us killed? I just wish it had been me, bro.

BH: The hell you do. But aughhh, the pain... there's some things I need to say before I shuffle off this bleak uncaring world.

DM: What, like the bleak uncaring void is any better?

BH: Seriously, this is my legacy we're talking about here. My legacy can't just be Ultimate Cheeseburgers. When I was a pup at the academy, I promised myself that I would make a difference in the multiplayer world. So let me just say, before I succumb to death's cold embrace, that the *Unreal Tournament* demo is a lot better than I would have given it credit for.

DM: Billy, it's just the shock. You've lost a lot of blood, not to mention a big damn chunk out the middle of your chest. We agreed that we couldn't be bothered with the *UT* demo.

BH: No, I jumped the gun. It's fun, especially in CTF and single shot-kill mode. And I have to admit that the bots are the best I've ever seen. The first time I saw a guy playing alone at his desk, I assumed that the bots were actually human enemies. I was impressed.

With his dying breaths, Billy finds some good things to say about the *UT* demo.

DM: It's just delirium. All the bots in creation aren't going to stand in for a single motivated human and his railgun. If you need proof about that, just look at your chest! But regardless, both *Quake III* and *UT* are just prettier, "multiplayer-focused" reissues of a stale gaming environment. Frag, flag-grab, lah dee-dah. It's time for counterterrorism games and World War Two re-creations and anything but quasi-futuristic slayfests.

BH: Wait, there's more I want to say. More to my legacy.

DM: Save your strength, brother. The paramedics will be here soon.

BH: No! I... I have to say this. Action game designers should keep graphical considerations second, behind good old-fashioned gameplay.

DM: Sheesh, why don't you state something a little more obvious, like "I want to live. You're preaching to the converted, big guy.

BH: You always did hate me. That's why you always make me walk point when we go on raids.

DM: That's crap! You're famous for hanging at the back of the pack, encouraging squadmates forward to their deaths! "In the rear with the gear," that's the place to find Creamy Smooth.

BH: I'm just playing the game the way it realistically should be played, which is slowly and methodically. Which brings me to the next point of my dying legacy. *Rogue Spear* is just about a perfect multiplayer game design. You really have to rely on your teammates, and the process involves communication, cooperation, and synchronized effort. That's the stuff that gets people interested in a game, not random railgunning.

DM: A random railgun seemed to do the freakin' trick on you. Chief Whitta's gonna be mad that I let you get fragged. You're my partner, my responsibility.

BH: *(gasping)* No, no, you can't blame yourself. My anguished ghost will haunt you the rest of your miserable days, but you can't blame yourself for my death, buddy. Aughhh... just because my blood is all over your hands, doesn't mean anything, partner.

DM: Thanks, buddy. *(sniff)* But don't give up, you're not dead yet. *(Looks at watch.)*

BH: Hey, quit looking at your damn watch!

DM: Sorry, pal. What other pearls of wisdom did you want to impart?

BH: A note in general to real-time strategy designers. Unhhh! ...take a tip from the Blizzard folks and *WarCraft III*. "Multiplayer" doesn't have to mean "without story." I can't think of too many multiplayer games that would be more fun than a combination of small-party combat action, combined with good character-building and deep story elements, in partially scripted user-designed mult. player missions.

DM: I'm right there with you. Regular RTS has more or less run its course, and our lukewarm reaction to multiplayer *Tiberian Sun* is more or less proof of that. Like you, I can't wait to try a little taste of "roleplaying strategy" online against other players.

BH: Pity I won't live to see it.

DM: Yeah. That kinda sucks.

BH: Uhhh!... ...this is it. I'm ready. But I have one last dying request.

DM: Anything, buddy. You name it.

BH: Can I get some freelance assignments from beyond the grave? Maybe under a pseudonym, like William Harmzinski?

DM: Er...no.

(Chief Whitta's Report: Officer Harms' death, while tragic and untimely, was not altogether unexpected. His devil-may-care attitude had caused for lots of frustration in my office but lots of hilarious hijinks, too. We'll miss him.)

PCG

ROB SMOLKA

THE POINT AFTER

BASEBALL BASKETBALL FOOTBALL HOCKEY GOLF SOCCER ETC.

A Look Back

As the first year of The Point After comes to a close, Smoke revisits some previous topics armed with the blessed power of hindsight.

We all know how time flies when you're having fun, but this is ridiculous. This month's column marks the end of the first year of The Point After, and I just can't believe how enjoyable and interesting it's been. I'd like to thank all of you who have written to me over the past year with your comments and opinions on the various topics I've covered, and to those I haven't responded to personally, I apologize. The life of a magazine editor can get pretty hectic, and while I try to answer all of the E-mail I get, sometimes it's just not possible. But keep writing in — I promise you that I read and appreciate every message I get, and when time permits, I'll be sure to write you back.

So, to wrap up this first year, I thought it would be interesting to revisit some of the earlier columns and provide updated information where applicable.

January: When I first introduced myself to you, I told you about some of my favorite games from each sport. As expected in an industry that seems to measure time in dog years, things have changed pretty considerably. All of my baseball needs now are well served by *High Heat 2000*, and *Madden 2000* has replaced *NCAA 99* as my preferred action football game. I find myself playing Sierra's *PGA Championship Golf* a lot more often than either *Links LS 99* or *Jack Nicklaus 6: Golden Bear Challenge* (both of which are fine games). I no longer have to make a choice between arcade and simulation style racing. *Viper Racing* satisfies both sides of my need for speed.

February: A conversation with Mike Franco of Hypnos Entertainment gave us some early details about *Jack Nicklaus 6*. One of the items we discussed had me especially excited — the inclusion of Jim Nance in the announcer's booth. I love Nance's work on CBS, but he sounded like he had a golf club inserted up his butt while delivering his boring and stilted commentary in the game. Fortunately, the rest of the package more than made up for Nance's phoned-in lines, and this turned out to be a great update to a classic series.

March: I was like a kid in a candy store while visiting Team 366 to get an in-depth look at *High Heat 2000*. Although a few bugs managed to slip through (most have since been remedied by two patches), the final version turned out to be one of my favorite games of all time. I just completed a full 162-game season with a team I drafted. I finished the season at 97-65, made the playoffs as the wild card entry, and lost in the seventh game of the league championship series. I have never enjoyed losing as much as I did here. What amazed me was how accurate the stats turned out, even with me playing every game in arcade mode. The MVP of the league was Sammy Sosa, who was on my squad. His final numbers: .281 batting average, 64 homers, 147 RBIs, 157 strikeouts, and 19 stolen bases.

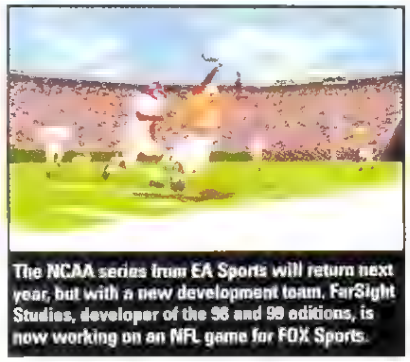
April and June: The tragic story of *Front Page Sports: Football 99*, and the angry follow-up from readers, was a sad chapter in the world of PC sports gaming. We later learned that the series, regarded as one of the all-time greats, was scrapped completely. In fact, racing and golf are the only two "legitimate" sports left from Sierra (and don't bet too heavily on another golf game). Check out this month's Eyewitness section for more gamer-unfriendly changes taking place at Sierra.

May: My roundup of user created files and the web sites that carry them proved quite popular. Here's a few fresh ones for you to check out:

- FIFA series
  www.fifa.net
- *PGA Championship Golf*
  teebox.coursedepot.com
- Sports' NHL series
  www.nhl-online.com
- *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit*
  www.nfsnation.com/index2.html
- *High Heat 2000*
  baseballsimcentral.com/dloads/High_Heat/High_Heat_2000/
- *NFL Fever 2000*
  www.nflfever.com

July: My plea to game designers to include more user-adjustable options in games didn't fall on deaf ears. Both *Madden 2000* and *NHL 2000* include numerous ways for the gamer to tailor the difficulty levels and player abilities, and the games are better because of it. I see this positive trend continuing and expanding in the future.

August: In my E3 show report, I mentioned that *NCAA 2000* was canned because the developers felt there wasn't enough time to implement enough new features. As it turns out, this wasn't entirely accurate. Just recently I received an E-mail from Jay Obernolte of FarSight Studios, the developer for both *NCAA 98* and *NCAA 99*. He says that after completing *NCAA 99*, the team decided that the grass looked a lot greener in FOX Sports' yard, where it'll be working on *NFL on FOX 2001*. The team was somewhat miffed with EA because it wasn't allowed to develop the game across multiple platforms (the PlayStation versions are designed by Tiburon, who will also be developing the 2001 PC version). This bodes very well for the initial football offering from FOX next year.



The NCAA series from EA Sports will return next year, but with a new development team. FarSight Studios, developer of the 98 and 99 editions, is now working on an NFL game for FOX Sports.

September: Here I talked about some things I'd like to see in the distant future of sports games. Look for a follow-up piece in the next couple of months, where I talk to a few developers to get some of their ideas.

October: Ah yes...ads in games. As expected, I received quite a few opinions from readers about this subject. Surprisingly, though, many liked my ideas! The people that disagreed with me made very valid points, and I enjoyed reading all of your responses. It will be interesting to see if any of the suggestions I made are implemented down the road.

November: I hope you enjoyed my chat with Oliver Ongtin, one of the testing supervisors at EA Sports. As a gamer, I found the information that Oliver shared with us fascinating, and hope to revisit this subject again. What I'd like to do is spend a day in the shoes of a beta tester and report back to you on it.

December: Once again, thanks to everyone who took the time to write in and share his or her opinions. For my part, I plan on making the next year's worth of columns even better, and if there's anything you'd like to see covered, please let me know, and I'll see what I can do. PCG

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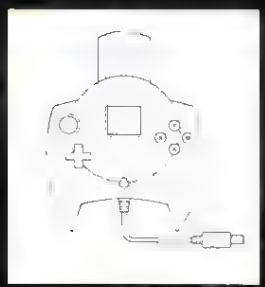
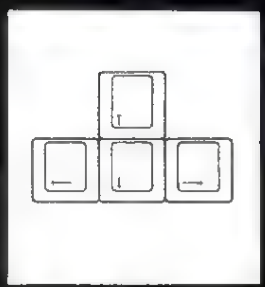
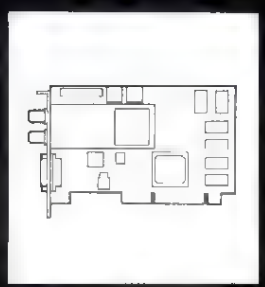

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Want Some Cheese With That Whine?

Luton needs a lot of caffeine on Monday mornings because otherwise the result is a diatribe of epic proportions. Fire up your Bitching Motor because here he goes....

Whenever the new issue of *PC Gamer* arrives in the office, the first thing I do is turn to Mike Wolf's column to see what he's complaining about. Go ahead, try it yourself. Turn to page 232 and quickly scan through it to see what he's whining about this month. *(Um, Mike, Alternate Lives is a preview of* Ultima Online 2 *this month — Ed.)*

Oh. Right. Anyway, last month Wolf was going on about how there were too many roleplaying games and not enough time to play them all, — not to mention the fact that he wasn't the "chosen one" to review *System Shock 2*. The month before, he was complaining about adventure games being dead and how nobody truly role plays their characters anymore. Personally, I've tried to avoid this kind of whining here in The Killing Box because I believe in seeking out the positive side of life. But that attitude can only last so long before you realize some things are just plain crap. That's right, I just can't be a nice guy anymore. So get ready for a wave of complaints. Next month, we'll return to the happy fun topics you're accustomed to reading about here in The Killing Box, but for now it's time to vent some things.

I Hate Cyborgs!

Sometimes it's hard to go against the grain of popular opinion. Everyone here at the office is head-over-heels in love with *System Shock 2*. I'm quite enamored with it myself, but I have one problem. I hate those freakin' cyborg zombies! First of all, didn't we see the scientist-turned-into-zombie motif in another little game called *Half-Life*? Secondly, if I have to play yet another game where the enemies are dead guys who've been reanimated with cybernetic enhancements I think I'm going to break down and cry. And what's the deal with those little monkeys that throw blue glowing balls at you? I know it must be tough for developers to keep coming up with original designs for bad guys, but look at all of the creative monsters in *Half-Life*. It can be done.

This fella was once human but is now a mutated robot zombie. Can you smell the cheese?

No More Boxes!

Every first person shooter has the obligatory warehouse. This is where the designers pack an entire level with shipping crates, bins, and other rectangular containers. We, the players, then weave our way through this maze of boxes looking for hidden nooks with power ups and killing the occasional monster. *Kingpin* takes the warehouse level to all new heights, with not just one or two but almost *thirty* of this kind of level! I really enjoyed playing that game, but have to admit I grew a little tired of exiting one warehouse to cross the street and enter yet another one. I'm sending out a plea to level designers everywhere please, no more boxes. I've seen enough shipping crates to last several lifetimes.

Long Level Load Times

It all started with *Unreal*. Then it continued with practically every game that has come out since. *Blood 2*, *SiN*, *Heretic II*, *Kingpin*, *System Shock 2*, and *Descent III* among them. All have fallen victim to long load times. Start up a level in any one of these games and you'll have enough time to head to the refrigerator, chug a Surge, go to the bathroom, and drive to the liquor store to pick up a bottle of Hennessy before you'll be able to actually play anything. This ugly trend has got to stop. Gamers have traditionally been concerned about having a fast CPU, lots of RAM, and a cutting edge video card to get good game performance. Are we now going to have to start thinking about Ultra Wide SCSI hard drives just to make load times more bearable?

Still No *Daikatana*

The new two-page ad for *Daikatana* reads, "Will you be ready?" Hell yeah, we'll be ready! The problem is we've been ready for more than two years now. A more appropriate question is "Will *it* be ready?" I don't think there's anything wrong with a company taking its time to make sure its game is up to par, but ION Storm has been pushing *Daikatana* for a long time now, and it's been more than six months since the Mplayer demo came out. Is anyone still going to be interested when the full game finally comes out?

No *Prey* — Ever?

On the other end of the hype spectrum is 3D Realms. Remember *Prey*? This game boasted a Native American hero and the first use of the much-vaunted Portal technology. Unfortunately, it seems to have disappeared off the development radar, so I asked 3D Realms' Scott Miller to give us an update — and the news was not good. "*Prey* is on hold while we create new technology to support the ambitious goals of the game," says Miller. "Also, as a company we've decided that internally we want to work on just a single game at a time, and currently *Duke Nukem Forever* is that game."

I guess that philosophy is pretty hard to argue with, but I reserve the right to grumble about *Prey*'s hiatus just the same. We'll have to be patient and wait a little while longer, but I think my feelings were summed up best by that one dead guy who hasn't been reanimated with cybernetic enhancements — Doors singer Jim Morrison, that is — when he said, "We want the world, and we want it now!"

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Get used to this view of boxes upon boxes if you want to play all the way through *Kingpin*. In many of the levels, it's one warehouse after another.

MICHAEL WOLF

First Look at *Ultima Online 2*

Although the company is not giving out too many facts, Origin has begun to answer some questions about its sequel to the world's biggest online RPG.

Ultima Online has enjoyed more than two years of online mayhem. The massively multiplayer online role playing game has let players bake bread, fight orcs, and — of course — kill innocent players for a long time, and now it's time for some new blood. Origin has just recently announced the next generation of *Ultima Online*, and it's going to have a distinctive new feel.

This time, the world of Britannia can be explored in full 3D. When asked if *Ultima Online 2* will use the same engine as *Ultima IX Ascension*, Starr Long, producer of the game, vehemently responds, "How tired am I of this question? The *Ascension* engine is a single-player engine. Is *UO2* single player? No!" In other words, it's a new engine. According to Origin's Vice President of Development and executive producer of the game, Jeff Anderson, "We've learned a lot about online entertainment over the past two years since we launched *Ultima Online*. But, most important, we learned that we are not just making 'games' any more. We're building virtual worlds that will offer new ways for people to interact, socialize and adventure on the Internet."

The new game promises to hold the usual improvements of a sequel — more creatures, a bigger game world, and technological leaps unattainable by the first *Ultima Online*. This includes some changes in combat. Long says, "Without giving out exactly how combat works, I will say there are tons of different combat moves as opposed to the standard single-sword swing of most RPGs. Those moves were all motion-captured so they look truly amazing. There is nothing turn-based about *UO2*." When asked about how the magic system works, Long replied with the enigmatic comment, "It will be different from *UO* but that's all I can say for now."

What we *do* know about the game, however, indicates that it will provide even more interaction in a 3D world, more so than even than the other two giants of online role playing — *EverQuest* and *Asheron's Call*. *UO2* will maintain the focus on community so prevalent in the original players will be able to communicate in a variety of ways (and the on-the-fly translation software introduced in *Ultima Online: The Second Age* will remain) and players can own property. Character movement is motion captured for realism, and most of the monsters are in the process of being conceptualized by Todd McFarlane, the creator of the *Spawn* animated series. Origin will even partner with McFarlane Entertainment to create a line of animated figures based on the *UO2* world.

As far as how quests are going to work, Long's response to the question was "They're going to work really well." Uh, okay, we trust you. We're told that the game will contain overall goals relating to the Virtues. What that means, Origin isn't saying.

As you've probably gathered by now, Origin really isn't answering too many questions about the game at all. But what they are saying is certainly enough to whet my appetite for the real deal. The most verbose answer Long gave was in response to the question regarding the handling of player-killing. He said, "We are in a unique position where we have had a chance to watch *UO* over the last two years to see what works and what doesn't. We have also assembled a team from all over the industry who have added valuable experience to the mix as well. Together we have come up with what we think are some really cool ideas about how to make issues like player-killing much better. These solutions are different from what is being done now in other products, including *UO*. What they are, I can't say yet. Sorry." Um, okay, we're getting the picture.

The various skills for trade and combat will still be in place, although Long says that specialization will be much more important in *UO2*. Other similarities to *Ultima Online* include a variety of servers, and players being unable to move their characters from server to server.

When asked specifically about the differences between *UO* and *UO2*, Long replied, "The fiction adds some completely new elements and gameplay opportunities. There will be a large quest related to the Virtues, and character advancement is different. There's more than that, but you'll just have to wonder about the rest for a bit."

Although the game itself is still shrouded in mystery, hopefully it won't be long before that shroud is removed to reveal the mechanics of the game in greater detail. It's still more than a year away from launch, which means a lot could happen. *EverQuest*'s expansion pack will launch in March, *Asheron's Call* should be up and open to the public around the time you read this, and other online roleplaying games are in the works from less-known companies (such as *Shadowbane* from Wolfpack Studios — *www.shadowbane.com*. More on that next time). With so much going on, *Ultima Online 2* will have to do a lot to truly wow gamers who will have ventured through 3D worlds for more than a year by the time it's released, but there's little doubt that if anyone could revolutionize the 3D online roleplaying game, it's Origin and *Ultima*.

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What If...?

"You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you." — Leon Trotsky

By the time Darius III inherited the Persian Empire, he had already proven himself to be sagacious, far-sighted and brave. He would need all those qualities to face the new menace from the West: an army of plunder-starved Macedonian thugs led by a vain, drunken, but tactically brilliant young king named Alexander. When the first big battle between the invaders and Darius' Anatolian forces loomed, on the banks of the Granicus River in 334 B.C., the Persians laid a cunning trap.

They knew Alexander led from the front, wearing a distinctive white-plumed helmet that made him conspicuous to friend and foe alike. They also knew he was likely to initiate battle with a headlong cavalry charge. So when Alexander did, in fact, lead his horsemen across the river, the Persians made a show of resistance, then seemingly melted before the attack. They let Alexander plunge deep into their ranks, then suddenly closed around him, trapping the Macedonian cavalry. A valiant Anatolian soldier (ironically enough, a Greek mercenary) named Spithridates nailed Alexander on the head with an ax, almost sundering the fabled white-plumed helmet.

This much is history. But consider, if you will, an alternate variant. Dazed, Alexander slumped in the saddle whereupon Spithridates delivered a second blow, splitting the Macedonian king's head like a melon.

Leaderless and already squabbling over succession, the lesser Macedonian nobles hurriedly withdrew. Secure from external threats, the Persian Empire expanded to rule the Middle East and flourished for centuries. Wisely, it practiced religious tolerance and its rulers revered stability, tradition, ritual, and culture. There was no Hellenistic Period, no Renaissance, no Christianity. Mohammed remained an obscure court scholar. By the time Christ finished his career as a minor cult leader in Judea, Aramaic and Latin were the only tongues that mattered.

The Colonel explores some of the speculative byways of military history. It turns out we're all real lucky that we're not doing this salute today.

This did not happen, of course. Spithridates never delivered that second blow. A Macedonian named Cleitus skewered him with a spear, Alexander rallied, and the Persians were crushed at the Battle of the Granicus. Thus was the direction of Western Civilization decided in the interval of a heartbeat.

Alternative history (often sneeringly dismissed by academics as "counterfactualism") has always been a major ingredient in the popularity of wargames. While it is instructive to recreate historical engagements exactly as they happened, it is also boring to do it more than once or twice. The fun lies in tweaking the facts, be it slightly or grossly, to see not "what happened," but what *might have happened*.

For that reason, I'm venturing slightly off-topic in this column (as I did in the very popular "War Movies" piece), to heartily recommend a new book entitled *What If?* (Putnam, $27.95, ISBN 0-399-14536-1). It is the brainchild of Robert Cowley, who edits the classy *Military History Quarterly* (pricey, but worth it). Cowley approached some of today's best known military historians, asked them to select their favorite "what if" scenario, and expound upon it.

The resulting volume is pure heaven for wargamers. Some of the topics are classics, such as James McPherson's examination of the legendary "Lost Order" episode during Lee's 1862 invasion of Maryland. If the order had not been lost, McPherson tells us, there is every reason to believe Lee would have crushed McClellan utterly and won the Civil War in a single day. Of course, McClellan, having been given this priceless intelligence, frittered away his chances and the net result was the ghastly and indecisive slaughter at Antietam.

> Dazed, Alexander slumped in the saddle, whereupon Spithridates delivered a second blow, splitting the Macedonian king's head like a melon.

Stephen Ambrose, probably the most popular living historian (and with good reason), speculates on what would have happened if the English Channel weather had been as rotten on June 6, 1944, as it was on June 5. Disaster on the beaches, the collapse of the Allied alliance, Roosevelt defeated at the polls, and the A-bomb dropped on Berlin, just to name a few of his suggestions. David McCullough points out that the British had George Washington in a perfect trap after the Battle of Long Island, and the only thing that saved American independence was a fortuitous fog that settled over the East River. And the magisterial John Keegan describes several plausible ways Hitler could have won long before D-Day was anything but a gleam in Churchill's eye.

Even more interesting are some of the more obscure "what ifs." My favorite is essayist Lewis Lapham's droll evocation of what could have happened if Augustus Caesar had sent a tough, competent general, against the Germanic tribes instead of the indolent and downright stupid Varus. With the *Furor Teutonicus* subdued, Lapham envisions a Pax Romana stretching to the Vistula and the non-appearance of rabid German nationalism. "Frederick the Great would have been a circus dwarf, and Kaiser Wilhelm would have become obsessed with stamp collecting instead of cavalry boots."

The essays vary in length and tone, from witty romps to sober meditations, but there's not a dull page in the book. The majority of academic historians (the stuffy sort who seem determined to make history as dry and boring as possible) may regard such "counterfactual" exercises as mere parlor games for flighty fantasists, but to wargamers they are meat and gravy.

I guarantee *What If?* to be a lively and provocative read, and the next time you set out to design a big what-if scenario with an editing program, you'll have plenty of new and juicy ideas to work with. PCG

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Look Ma, No Missiles...

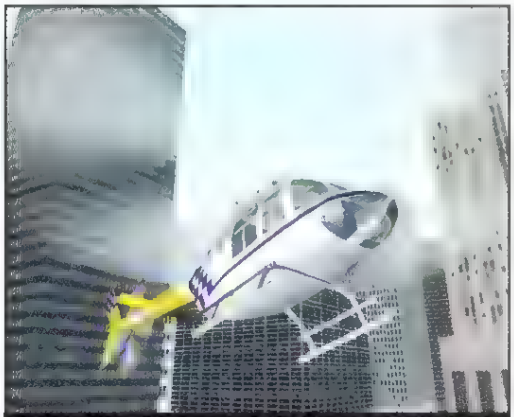
Microsoft proves that even "civilian" flight sims can be lethal to competitors, as two challengers vie against a solid champ for rights to the friendly skies.

It doesn't seem that long ago that Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* series was the only game in town when it came to general aviation sims. Although the Redmond crew certainly weren't the major players in the gaming business back in the late 1980s that they are today, their FlightSim series pretty much ruled the roost as the title of choice for dedicated civilian flight simmers. Since the introduction of *FlightSim 4.0* in 1987, each new edition of this powerful franchise has consistently managed to dominate the sales charts — due in no small part to Uncle Bill's massive distribution network.

Oddly enough, it wasn't until the mid-1990s that anyone even attempted to mount a serious challenge to Microsoft's stranglehold on this lucrative market. *Flight Unlimited*, an aerobatic-themed sim from Looking Glass Studios that almost single-handedly redefined photorealistic terrain graphics, was released late in 1995 and was followed a couple of years later by Sierra's *Pro Pilot*. Although the latter title offered one of the most complete ATC (Air Traffic Control) implementations ever seen in a flight sim, it was hobbled by so many bugs and incomplete features that it never really got off the ground.

Times change. Skip ahead to the present, and we now have a full-scale war on our hands, as several publishers vie for control of the virtual commercial skies. There's a take-no-prisoners battle going on between Microsoft, Looking Glass, and newcomer Terminal Reality for a cut of your hard-earned flight sim dollars, and the casualties are already starting to pile up. You don't have to look any further than Sierra/Dynamix's recently cancelled *Pro Pilot* title to see how turbulent the ride has become.

Although Dynamix fixed many of its original game's broken parts with last year's *Pro Pilot 99* and was all set to kick it up another notch with *Pro Pilot Paradise* (aka *Pro Pilot 2000*) this winter, the entire project was scrapped in late September by parent companies Sierra and Havas Interactive. Hell, Havas decided to pull the ticket on Dynamix's WWII-themed *Desert Fighters* while they were at it, effectively shutting down the Oregon-based developer altogether. (And even more recently, the entire unit was submarined completely.) If *Pro Pilot 99* had been able to carve out some decent numbers against *FlightSim 98* and *Flight Unlimited II* when it was released last Christmas, then I would probably be writing a preview of *Pro Pilot Paradise* rather than a company obituary. Chalk up one confirmed kill to those "unarmed" Cessnas and Learjets from Microsoft.



FlightSim 2000 will feature the Bell helicopter, which will offer flight simmers vertical as well as horizontal experience.

So who's left to take the fight to the Gates Gang? Well, the first of the new products to make its way onto store shelves this past summer was *Fly!*. This maiden collaboration between G.O.D. (Gathering of Developers) and Terminal Reality is clearly one of the most ambitious civilian flight simulators ever produced. Featuring five exhaustively detailed aircraft (ranging from a Cessna 172 to a Hawker business jet) and more than 9,500 worldwide airports, *Fly!* certainly doesn't suffer from a lack of depth. In fact the sim's superb instrument panels and authentic engine start-up procedures are almost worth the price of admission all by themselves. The GPS navigation, ATC, and weather effects are also outstanding, and the game's individual flight models are some of the best I've seen. But is it enough goodies for *Fly!* to soar to the head of the pack? Nope. Not with version 1.0 anyway. The game is still too buggy, and its current terrain graphics are much too flat and bland to qualify for that honor, but keep your eyes peeled to this space. This puppy has future potential.

That only leaves *Flight Unlimited III* to try and topple Microsoft from its lofty perch. Looking Glass' previous two releases have been generally well-received and the change in publishers (from Eidos to Electronic Arts) isn't likely hurt the new sim's chances. Carrying on in the tradition of its predecessors, *Flight Unlimited III* is by far the most graphically sumptuous sim in the race. The game cranks out some of the most amazing photorealistic scenery ever squeezed through a 3D accelerator card, and backs this up with solid flight model treatments of ten extremely interesting and diverse aircraft. Factor in some impressive weather effects, comprehensive ATC, and even a full-blown scenery editor, and surely you must have a winner on your hands here, right? Well, maybe. The attention to detail in the game is certainly impressive, but the limited flyable airspace (Seattle area only) and the slideshow framerate on mid-range machines are likely to hurt it when the gloves come off.

I've been able to log quite a few hours with the retail versions of *Fly!* and *Flight Unlimited III* and have found a lot of things to like about both titles, despite their aforementioned shortcomings. Unfortunately for Terminal Reality and Looking Glass, Microsoft will have ushered in *FlightSim 2000* by the time you read this and, judging by the spec sheet on the new game, it appears as though the pissing contest is only going to escalate. Remember *Flight Unlimited III*'s impressive collection of 10 flyable aircraft? *FS2000 Pro Edition* will have 12 (including the Concorde). *Fly!*'s 9,500 worldwide airports? Try 20,000 in *FS2000*! Real-time weather? Check. GPS navigation? Check. State-of-the-art 3D terrain graphics? Check. These guys play hardball!

I wasn't able to log any stick time with Microsoft's latest entry before putting this column together, so I can't really say if *FlightSim 2000* is going to put the squeeze on its competition the same way its parent sims have been doing for the past 17 years. I just hope that *Fly!* and *Flight Unlimited III* don't do a dodo bird à la *Pro Pilot* and disappear off the map. It's a big sky up there, and there's plenty of room for everyone. PCG

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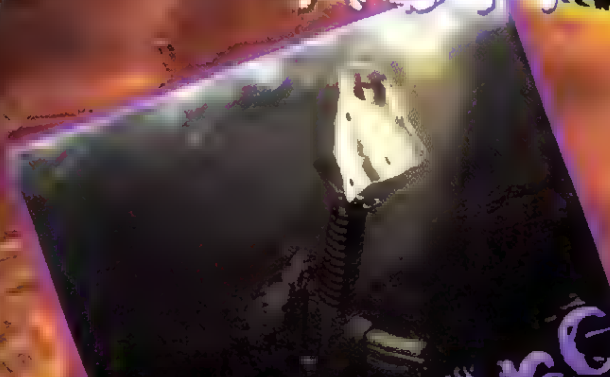

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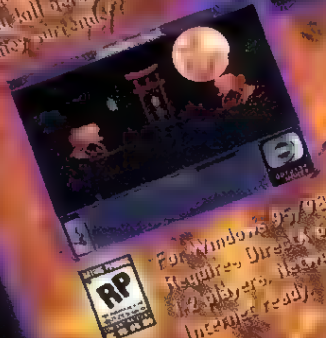

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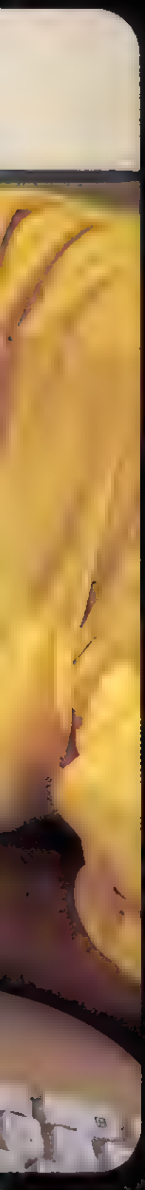

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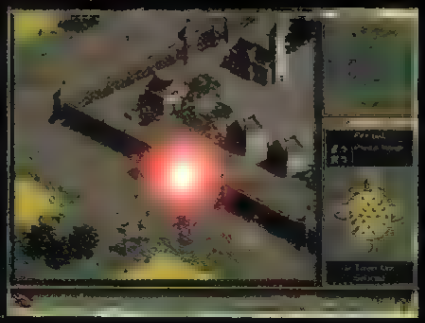

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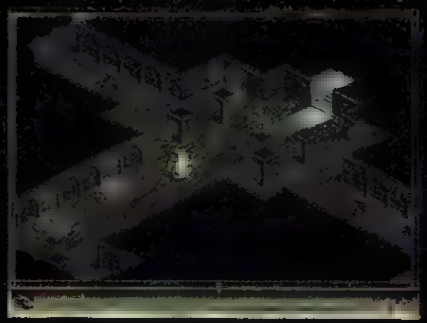

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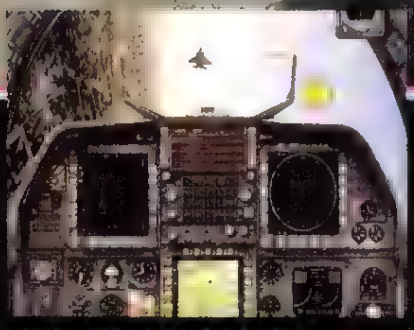

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Even the highly trained, deeply focused readers of *PC Gamer* need some intel to solve the occasional purchase. Luckily, we keep coming through in fine form.

Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six earned a reputation among gamers for being one of the least forgiving games out there — one wrong move, and you're dead. The sequel, *Rogue Spear*, lives up to that reputation, and more... which is why you'll no doubt be thanking us for coming to your aid with these invaluable hints, direct from the game's designers! Special thanks go to Red Storm's Jeff Wand, John Sonedecker, Steve Cotton, and Greg Stelmack for this great material.

Step One: The Ten Commandments

1. Know thy level!
2. Customize your gear to your environment
3. The heavier the armor, the slower (and noisier) you are.
4. Use your surroundings to your advantage. Remember why you have camouflage on.
5. Flashbangs are less likely to kill friendlies
6. Always watch your "six" (as in your rear)
7. Two-man teams means the guy in the rear is using a Heartbeat Sensor.
8. The best strategy is different than the one you just used
9. First one to a bott eneck wins!
10. You have a better shot when not moving. Don't get flustered

Step Two: Use the Right Equipment

Primary Weapon and Ammunition

Your choice of primary weapon should always be dependent on the environment. In *Rogue Spear* there is a much wider variety of weapons to suit the player's tastes. And unlike *Rainbow Six*, where the CAR-15 stood out as the dominant weapon, there is a wide variety, or dare we say, a plethora of capable weapons that will accomplish the job nicely. A general guideline is to use assault weapons for outside levels with FMJ, submachines in interior levels with FMJ or JHP ammo, and pistols with JHP ammo.

AMMUNITION

First off, let's discuss ammunition. Every gun in our game with the exception of the shotguns has two types of ammunition available JHP and FMJ. Shotguns have three types: buckshot, slugs, and rubber batons

JHP stands for Jacketed Hollow Point. This round is designed to expand on impact, thus increasing the amount of damage it inflicts. However, this makes it much less likely to penetrate body armor

FMJ stands for Full Metal Jacket This round is designed to punch through the target. Wounds may be less severe than with JHP, although a single shot can still drop the target.

Buckshot is a spray of pellets fired from a shotgun. You have to be carefu to center the shot properly or you may hit a target that you did not intend to hit.

Slugs are essentially a large caliber bullet. These are often used for breaching doors

Rubber batons are meant to stun the target rather than inflict permanent injury.

So, which round to choose? Slugs are good for breaching doors and close-range armor penetration, buckshot is good when up against multiple targets, FMJ rounds are good for penetrating armor, JHP rounds are good for improving first-shot kill chances and reducing over-penetration, and rubber baton rounds are good for annoying your friends in a multiplayer game.

What is over-penetration? This is when the bullet hits a target but passes through and continues on to hit something else behind the target. You need to be careful with slugs and FMJ rounds when you are near hostages; you want to drop the terrorist, but you don't want to take the hostage with them. JHP rounds are much less likely to overpenetrate.

Here is a quick list of all the ammunition types available in *Rogue Spear* in a rough ordering of least powerful to most powerful. Silenced versions of these rounds are subsonic and thus will be less powerful than their normal counterpart:

- 7.65mm (.32 ACP)
- 9mmP
- .40
- .45
- 10mm
- .357 Magnum
- .50 AE
- 5.45mm Soviet
- 5.56x45mm NATO
- 7.62x39mm Soviet
- 7.62x51mm NATO
- 7.62x54mmR

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- .300 Winchester
- 12 gauge
- .50 Browning

Weapons firing the lower ammunition will tend to have shorter range but be more controllable.

Weapons

PISTOLS

Pistols are carried as backup weapons to be used when out of ammunition, or when the primary weapon is unsuitable for the current task. They have a short-range effectiveness, no zoom capability, and limited ammo, but when confronted with no other choice, they can still keep you in the game. In general, the pistols differ primarily in the ammunition they fire. More powerful ammunition generally implies greater wound effects, less ammo carried, and less controllability. Silenced pistols reduce the range but improve controllability. When choosing a pistol, you need to weigh these factors against your playing style. Here are the pistols in order from weakest to most powerful ammo.

- 9mm Beretta
- .40 USP
- .45 Mark23
- .357 Desert Eagle
- .50 Desert Eagle

Another factor in choosing a backup is the mission type and your primary weapon. For example, if I want a silenced weapon at the start but more power once the mission is running, I might choose a silenced pistol as a backup and an assault rifle as my primary, giving me a mix of silenced and powerful.

I'll usually carry the 9mm Silenced Beretta with JHP rounds when I need a quiet backup, or the .357 Desert Eagle with JHP rounds if I don't need to be quiet. I like Beretta's ammo capacity, while the Desert Eagle has a nice punch with a moderate ammo load.

SUBMACHINEGUNS

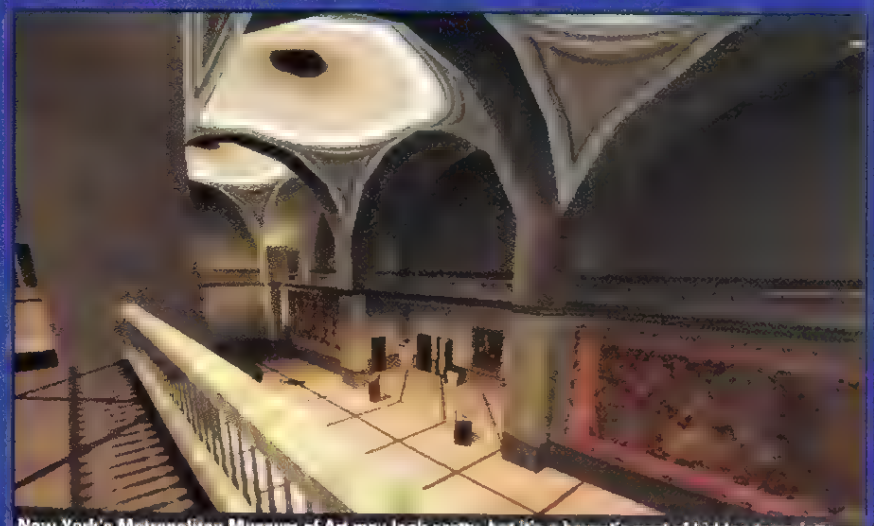
A submachinegun is a medium-sized weapon that fires pistol-type ammunition (that's where the "sub" comes from). They suffer from the same range limitations as pistols (since they fire the same ammunition) but have a higher ammo capacity and can get more lead into the air in a shorter period of time. These weapons are great for short-range assault work, but leave it at home if you expect a longer range fight. Trade-offs are similar to pistols except that the ammo capacity does not vary much from weapon to weapon.

Skorpion: Primarily a terrorist weapon, this submachinegun is the size and weight of a large pistol, and therefore is great for tight spaces. However, the round it fires is very underpowered; you can pepper someone in body armor all day long with little effect.

MP-5K PDW: This is a short, compact submachinegun that is easy to conceal. It is not as accurate as many of the others, but it has a quick reticule time making it very easy to maneuver. It also

Mission 01: Pandora Trigger • The Metropolitan Museum

Always watch out for enemy fire from the balconies in the main lobby of the museum. The display cases and various art exhibits are also excellent sources of cover. Now that players can crouch, doing so and hiding behind a glass display case is an excellent way of catching an opponent that is blitzing through the rooms off-guard. Watch out for opponents hiding in the stone structures in the large hall in the rear of the building and take care not to give away your position by tromping through the shallow moat/fountain that surrounds them. You can also catch opponents unaware by positioning yourself outside the rear of the building, peering into the large hall through the gigantic windows. Because you're outside in the dark night air, any opponents entering the room will have a hard time spotting anyone outside.



New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art may look pretty, but it's a hornet's nest of hidden terrorists just waiting to take you and the whole team out of the picture. Use extreme caution in exposed areas.

Mission 02: Arctic Flare • The Oil Freighter

The bow of the freighter is an excellent sniping spot to pick off anyone out in the open. You'll need one sniper for each of the two aisle ways. The outside ladders are also an excellent way to flank opponents by quickly traveling up to the main cabin of the ship. The rest of the ship is just full-blown close quarters combat where lightning reflexes and room clearing skills are tested. Use JHP ammunition and close quarters combat rifles for this level.

Ooooh...hold still, hold still. This poor guy is not long for this world, but he knew the risks when he became a terrorist.

Mission 03: Sandhammer • The Desalinization Plant

In this level, take the high ground, as opposed to running around on the lower levels. For enemies that are directly underneath the walkway you're on, toss frags. Bounce them off the industrial machinery if you have to. Again, take the stairways rather than climbing ladders to a higher elevation. It's much faster and safer.

Large outdoor areas like this one can be a real turkey-shoot if you're not careful. Hug the walls and be sure to stay away from wide open spaces.

has a very high rate of fire.

MP-5A4, MP-5/10A2: These are essentially the same weapons, they just fire different ammo. The MP-5A4 fires 9mmP and is a touch more controllable than the 10mm-firing MP-5/10A2, but the MP-5/10 is more likely to penetrate body armor when firing FMJ rounds.

MP-5SD6: This is a 9mmP MP-5 with a built-in silencer. The integral silencer makes it very quiet and easy to control.

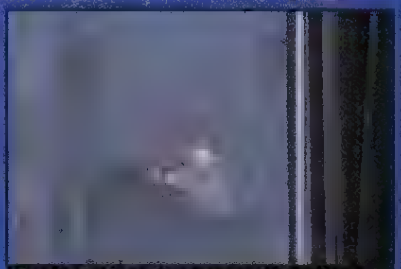
MP-5/10SD: Basically an MP-5/10A2 with an add-on silencer. The fact that the silencer is an add-on rather than integral makes the weapon a bit unwieldy.

UMP-45, UMP-45SD: These are a next-generation implementation of the MP 5 design firing a .45 round. This is a big, heavy, slow round that is good for damage but not as good for armor penetration as some of the other rounds. It carries a bit less ammo than the other SMGs, but fires at a slower rate of fire making it more controllable than some of the other SMGs. The SD version has an add-on silencer.

I tend to carry the MP-5SD6 with JHP rounds when I want to be quiet. It is controllable, making it easy to put rounds on the target, and the JHP rounds practically guarantee no over-penetration, thus eliminating the sound of the bullet striking the wall behind the target, which can alert nearby terrorists.

Mission 04: Lost Thunder • Kosovo

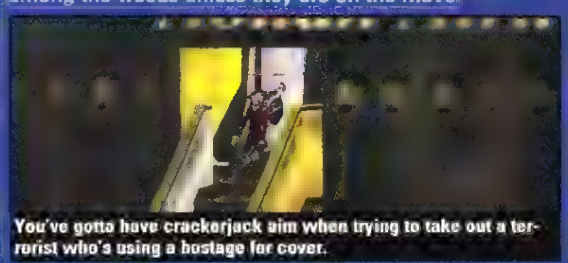
This is a level where the right camouflage is a huge advantage. There are plenty of sniping spots in the church and at high elevations, the tower in particular, but watch out because it's extremely easy to fall to your death if you get too close to the edge. Also, keeping a spotter to watch for anyone coming up the stairways is essential. C4 is useful when you've tracked down opponents into a tower and don't know how many are up there. You can place the explosive at the bottom of the stairway and watch from across the street until your opponent comes down when you detonate. Finally, beware of dead-end alleyways!



There's simply nothing more satisfying than a good sniper kill. Crouch to increase accuracy.

Mission 05: Perfect Sword • 747

For this level, use JHP ammunition and close quarters rifles because this is CQB at its extreme. Watch out for enemies that crouch between seat aisles. If you take the sniper approach, you can snipe from anywhere on the ridge of the hill among the weeds, or in the ditch along the runway. The hilltop weeds offer a unique camouflage opportunity, and it's nearly impossible to spot a sniper among the weeds unless they are on the move.



You've gotta have crackerjack aim when trying to take out a terrorist who's using a hostage for cover.

If I have a lot of close-in work against people w th body armor certain single player coop missions, or all multiplayer adversarial bat tles I carry the MP 5 10A2 The 10mm round has n ce armor penetrat on ab l t es at close range, and the control a bility is great when storm ng around the map Others in the room like the slow-fir ng relia- bility of the UMP-45 If I'm on a more open map, I'll upgrade to one of the assault rifles

ASSAULT RIFLES

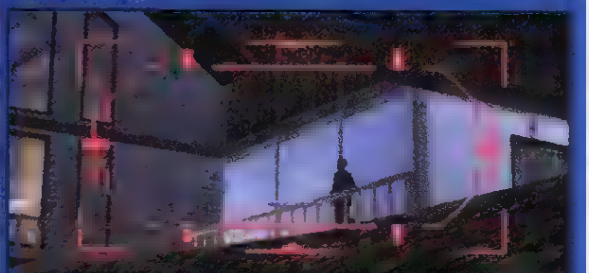
Assault r f es tend to be large, powerful weapons firing large-ca ber rounds. They have good range, but tend to over-penetrate and be less control able than subma- chineguns These are good for moderate range fights, and against people in body armor at most ranges.

M4 Carbine, G36K: These are short assault rifles, essen- tially a submachinegun firing rifle rounds Accuracy is not as good as the other assault rifles, but they are better at maneuver ng in t ght spaces The G36K has a n ce scope included

L85 Individual Weapon, Steyr AUG: These are bullpup assault rifles. They have longer barrels than the carbines above, but are shorter than a full-s ze assault rifle due to having the magaz ne behind the tr gger This makes them more accurate than the car b nes while still being maneuverable in tight spaces The Individual Weapon has a n ce scope included, while

Mission 06: Crystal Arc • Chalet, Autumn

For this mission, you should use JHP ammunition and close range rifles. This is a textbook room-clearing combat mission, so be prepared to use frags. The large windows in the den of the main structure of the chalet make a handy means of entrance or exit, and the sloping terrain provides favorable cover for sniping from the outside. The outer walls on the east side of the estate offers an excel- lent hiding spot with cover among the wall ruins.



The binoculars, a new feature in *Rogue Spear*, are very handy for getting a better look at an unknown area prior to approach.

Mission 07: Silent Drum • Television Studio

For this level, since the rooms are much larger, frags won't be as effective, and most of your encounters will be long hallway firefights, so travel in groups and overwhelm them with firepower when they come around the corner. When you do engage in lengthy hallway battles, keep a look out for doors along the hallway. Often times, you can take a shortcut through them that will have an exit that may lead to an exit behind your enemy, thereby flanking them.

Die, neo-nazi scum! When are these skinheads going to learn? Maybe these "martyrs" will teach the rest a lesson.

Mission 08: Feral Burn • The Dockyards

Avoid the water; it'll only impede your speed and give away your position. The grating in the fence offers excellent camouflage, especially when crouched. The stack of crates in the loading room (the one with the wench hanging from the ceiling) makes a handy perch for getting the jump on people. The walkway at the base of the crane provides an excellent angle on any hostiles roaming around on the lower levels, and of course the crane's cockpit itself provides a nice snug cubbyhole to snipe from. The trailers by the fence are a good source of cover, and the small office behind the crane platform has a window that provides cover, camouflage, and an excellent shot at anyone patrolling the walkway perimeter.

Mmmm...colored lighting. Now this is what we call atmospheric! (And is also a typical situation in which Billy would kill his own men...)

Mission 09: Diamond Edge • The Nuclear Storage Facility

The roofs of the bunkers on both sides of the facility provide a good vantage point to pick off anyone that roams the outside field, but watch out for enemies coming from the red-lit hallway. When trying to cross the middle field, you are wide open and the enemy has excellent cover behind a concrete wall with small gun ports installed. Avoid lurking by the windows of the offices. Unlike a lot of the other levels, these rooms are well lit and your profile is easily discernible from outside. When clearing the rooms in the facility, take advantage of the cover that various machinery provides. If someone rushes into a room and you happen to be half hidden by machinery, you have a distinct advantage.

Be careful where you fire your bullets on this level — there's nuclear material all around!

Mission 10: Silver Snake • Chalet, Winter

This is the same location as Mission 06: Crystal Arc but several months later in the winter. The same tactics apply, but change your camouflage to the arctic gear to suit the environment if your tactics require a lot of outdoor patrolling. Also be conscious of the fact that your breath is visible due to the cold and may give away your position.

Do you think a little snow is going to stop the world's most elite secret counterterrorist organization? They just need bigger jackets.

Mission 11: Oracle Stone • Spa Elnya

In the front courtyard, the in-ground pools provide good cover when crouched, and the weeds near the front walls provide camouflage. When passing through the bathing rooms, don't get distracted and start horsing around in the Jacuzzi. You give away your position when you're frolicking in the water and your speed is impeded. It's a bugzapper for the less-than-serious, and I've seen countless bodies laying in the Jacuzzi tub, riddled with bullets because they thought they were being cute when an enemy came along and had a differing opinion. Try to stay on the higher floors when possible such as in the library study and the back storage room. The balconies provide angles down on any opponents below, and the lower levels' enemies can be fragged as well.

Crouching behind small objects provides excellent cover.

the AUG is lighter and so a touch more maneuverable.

M-16: The standard US assault rifle. A nice mix of lightweight and good range.

M14, G3A3: Both are big, heavy, accurate assault rifles, just a notch down from the sniper rifles. Good range, but very unwieldy in tight corners. Ammo capacity is lower than the other assault rifles due to the larger cartridge.

AK-47, AK-74: The terrorist assault rifles. The AK-47 is bigger and heavier, while the AK-74 is lighter.

I really like the L85 for its maneuverability and zoom capabilities, but around the office it seems like each assault rifle has its proponent. Some like the accuracy of the M14 while others like the controllability of the G3A3. Some like the all-around performance of the M-16, while others like the compact M4 Carbine. Try different choices until you find one that suits your style. For that real ability to reach out and touch someone, you need a sniper rifle.

SNIPER RIFLES

Sniper rifles are slow firing, exceptionally accurate weapons. They have good scopes on them so you can zoom in across the map, but tend to carry limited ammo and be quite bulky. They are good long-range weapons, but you'll want a pistol for close-in work.

Walther WA2000: This is a bullpup sniper rifle. It's a bit less accurate than the others, but is more maneuverable. It's almost a compromise weapon; it can be used as a stationary sniper rifle, but if you get ambushed while getting into position it makes a nice emergency single shot assault rifle. It fires a fairly powerful round.

PSG-1: More accurate than the Walther, but it fires a slightly less powerful round and is hard to use in tight spaces.

Barret M82A1: The ultimate sniper weapon. The .50 Browning round it fires is great for stopping vehicles, but it takes time to set up the shot. You definitely want a pistol out when moving to your sniper perch.

Dragunov: The terrorist sniper rifle, roughly equivalent to the PSG-1.

Each of these weapons has its place. I often take the Walther in multiplayer as it is easy to get surprised, but if I have backup I'll take the PSG-1 for its accuracy. If there are vehicles that need stopping, there is no option besides the Barrett.

SHOTGUNS

Shotguns are specialized weapons. Their primary use in *Rogue Spear* is for door breaching, although some players like the close-range knockdown potential of these weapons.

Benelli M1 Tactical: Primarily used as a breaching weapon when loaded with slugs.

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SPAS-12: Probably the most fun weapon in the game, the SPAS-12 cannot be loaded with slugs but in return offers full-auto firing capabilities. This is a great weapon for clearing small to medium-sized rooms with multiple terrorists, but it takes a long time to reload the weapon shell by shell.

Sniping

Snipers are used as support in outdoor situations and require lots of patience and cunning. This is where knowledge of the map is crucial because you must know what likely route your target will travel to and where the bottleneck parts of the level are. The sniping rifles are the H&K PSG 1, the Walther 2000, the Dragonov, and the Barrett M95, a.k.a "God" among some Navy Seals. These rifles have extremely long-range capabilities, multiple zooms and are extremely *loud*. They also have long loading times and are very heavy. They usually require longer than normal targeting reticule focusing and are best fired from the crossed-legged sitting position for maximum accuracy. Due to the size and awkwardness of sniping rifles, it is extremely hard to move in a crouched walking position and takes several seconds to start moving forward once you decide to. They are also extremely inaccurate when you're moving and once you're on the move, it's best to switch to your secondary weapon until you find another spot to set up a sniping position. As so, it's crucial that a sniper travel with a "spotter," someone who will defend him while he is zoomed in and acquiring a target. A sniper is extremely vulnerable to being discovered and eliminated before he can even change to his secondary weapon.

Step Three: Tactics

Slicing the Pie

"Slicing the Pie" is a term used to describe the technique of turning a corner while minimizing exposure to gunfire and maintaining maximum line of sight. Basically it involves taking a corner wide, sidestepping slowly, and focusing your line of sight at the edge of the corner of the wall as you turn. This will at least put you on a near equal footing with an opponent that knows you're coming.

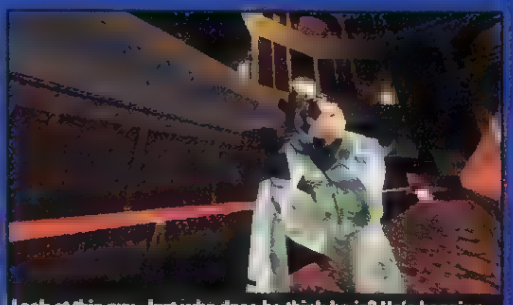
Room Clearing

There are several ways to clear a room. The standard SWAT-type scenario is for the point man to cover the door to prevent hostiles from fleeing the room. The second in line tosses a frag or flashbang into the room (being careful that no friendlies are in the line of site of the blast).

The way to clear a room without frag grenades is for the point man to rush in and peel against the inside wall of the doorway, neutralizing any hostiles in that corner. The second man peels in against the inside wall of the opposite

Mission 12: Temple Gate • Antoninum Opera House

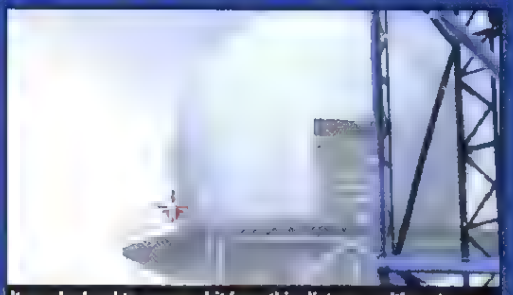
The box seats at the higher levels offer excellent angles onto the stage and seats. Watch out for enemies crouching between the rows of seats. They will only be easily visible from the upper decks. The hotspots for firefights are often behind the stage among the curtains and in the main lobby. When in the lobby, frag grenades are best thrown from behind the columns on the upper level. The balconies on either side of the upper level of the lobby are excellent spots for setting up positions as well.



Look at this guy. Just who does he think he is? He's begging to be double-tapped in the head, positively *begging* for it!

Mission 13: Sergeyev Pass • Svetlogorsk Station Stage I

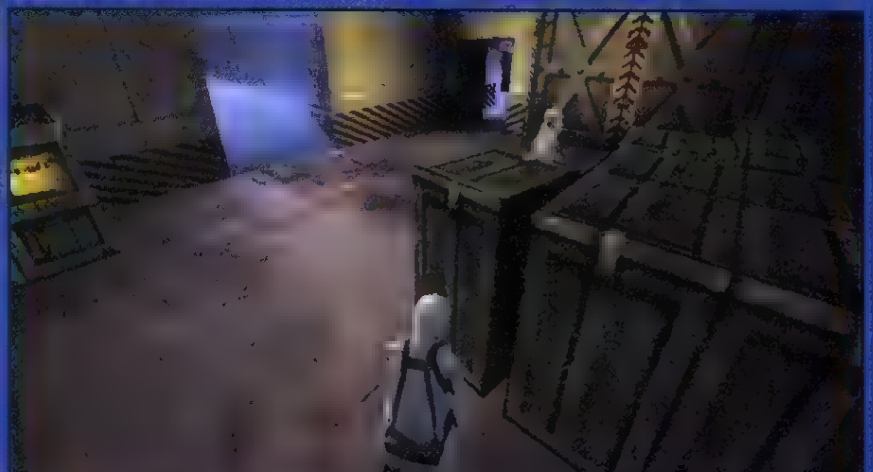
Watch out for enemies on the rooftops and in tower stations. The shadows of boulders and cliff walls mute the colors of uniforms, making it hard to distinguish friend from foe — and breath exhalation in the cold can give away your position. Although you may be tempted to equip yourself with a sniper rifle, you'll often find yourself inside the station in close quarter combat, rendering your weapon useless. The stairways and the bottlenecks in this level and well-placed frags or C4 will end the fights expediently.



It can be hard to score a hit from this distance with a standard assault rifle. You should've brought a sniper rifle along!

Mission 14: Majestic Gold • Svetlogorsk Station Stage II

For this level, take advantage of the cover available such as metal crates, snowmobiles, and various machinery. The trench in the northern end makes sneaking behind the bunkers a simpler task, but beware from fire from the bunkers. When you do eventually find your way inside a bunker the gunports allow a wide field of view to fire on any opponents, but you are also very visible due to the well-lit interiors. When hiding behind cover, be conscious of the fact that your exhaled breath in the cold can give away your position. In the lower level where the underground tunnel is, don't be fooled into thinking that the steel girders will provide cover. They are deceptively inadequate.



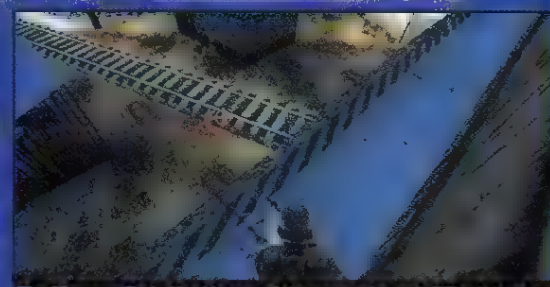
Your commandos might look a little bit silly in the all-white arctic camouflage gear, but it gives you life-saving cover against the snowy exteriors on this level. It's hell to get the bloodstains out of, though.

Mission 15: Frost Light • Spa Elnya, Autumn

This is the same level as Mission 11 [illegible]. Stay away from the Jacuzzi.

Mission 16: Hero Claw • Moscow Train Yard

This level is divided into two sections with most of the action taking place in the Southern one. Claiming the high ground, either by climbing up to the ledge by the boxcars or taking position in the tower, will give you good angles on any opponents travelling through the yard. Again, the tower interior is well lit, so your profile is easily discernible, but it does provide a near 180-degree angle on the goings-on of the southern section of the yard. When you're hunting on the ground level, take advantage of the shadows and watch out for snipers from the upper levels and crouched behind the boxcars. The Northern section of the level is a large concrete yard with trailers. The trailers provide a good hiding space and cover for whoever gets there first. Anyone else trying to make his or her way to the trailers is extremely exposed to enemy fire for a very long time.



The Moscow Train Yard is one of the most grim and difficult levels in the entire game...but it makes for some great multiplayer action.

Mission 17: Ebony Horse • Fortress Nadar

The main gate is the fastest route of entry into the castle, but easily defendable via the upper windows on both sides. Once you're through the defenses you have easy access to the upper battlements to take up sniper positions. The cistern passageway is an alternate route to the castle but will also be heavily defended. Try and work your way through it before enemies start lobbing frags, or you're nailed. Once you're out of the back storage rooms, work your way up to the upper levels of the castle into the prefab office additions in the castle rather than going to the inner courtyard. If you do have to go into the courtyard, travel along the wall to reduce exposure to gunfire. Take positions in the battlements if [illegible] across the courtyard.

This is a good tactic...one of your men moves into an uncharted area for a close-up look while a zoomed-in sniper provides backup.

Mission 18: Zero Gambit • Cherkasy Nuclear Power Plant

For this level, take the upper walkways when possible to get angles on any opponents below. Optimally, your want to control access to the uppermost walkway, giving you angles on anyone on the second level walkways and ground level. If they take cover directly underneath you to get out of your line of fire, toss frags, again bouncing grenades off the machinery if you have to. Also take advantage of the control windows to snipe from.

Oh no, not more hazardous nuclear material! Watch your fire but don't be afraid to toss a few frags when you need to.

side of the doorway and neutralizes any hostiles in that corner. This approach eliminates teammates walking through each other's line of fire and minimizes the chances of friendly fire.

Defending Against Room Clearing

Aside from never getting cornered in a room with only one exit, the best way to survive a frag attack is to rush into the direction of the frag grenade's origin and come out shooting. If you outrun the frag blast's damage radius, you stand an excellent chance of catching the opponent with his guard down (probably preparing another grenade), and therefore unable to switch to his primary weapon in time. If the enemy invades your room, crouch behind furniture or if there is no furniture, at least crouch. This will minimize your profile and make you a harder target to hit.

Combat at Less Than Five Meters

A very common occurrence. When opponents run into each other around a corner and start firing, they get flustered and fire aimlessly. In many cases, both sides run out ammo and dance around each other while they either reload or switch to their secondary weapon. Switching to your secondary weapon is a faster option than reloading, or you can run away for the nearest cover while reloading and hope that your opponent has lost sight of you. Once you have reloaded, don't just rush back in from the way you came; it would be more prudent to look for an alternate route and try to flank your opponent, or at least catch him unawares.

Booby Traps

With the inclusion of new items such as C4, the Heart Beat Jammer, the Stationary Heart Beat Sensor, and Fake Heartbeat Puck, there are new ways to set up booby traps other than the Door Breaching Charge trap. The False Heartbeat Puck is an excellent device for luring your opponent to a spot and sniping from a distance, or you can create a False Heartbeat Puck/C4 lethal combo.

Armor

Just like in *Rainbow Six*, Armor plays a vital role in *Rogue Spear*. The heavier the armor you choose to wear is, the more effective it is at stopping or minimizing damage from incoming rounds, especially hollow point ammunition. What armor really does is buy you a half-second (at the most) of time to find cover if an opponent gets the drop on you and you haven't acquired your target first. The disadvantage to armor is that it makes you heavier, slower, have noisier footsteps, and make noises when you rub against walls and railings. When players complain that they seem to move slower than in *Rainbow Six*, it is usually because they're equipped with the heavy or medium body armor options. Try the light have armor options if speed is your priority, but pay extra attention to stealth and evasion if you do so.

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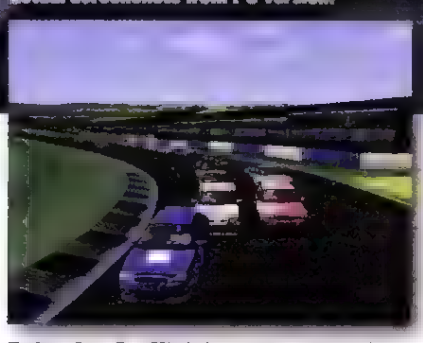

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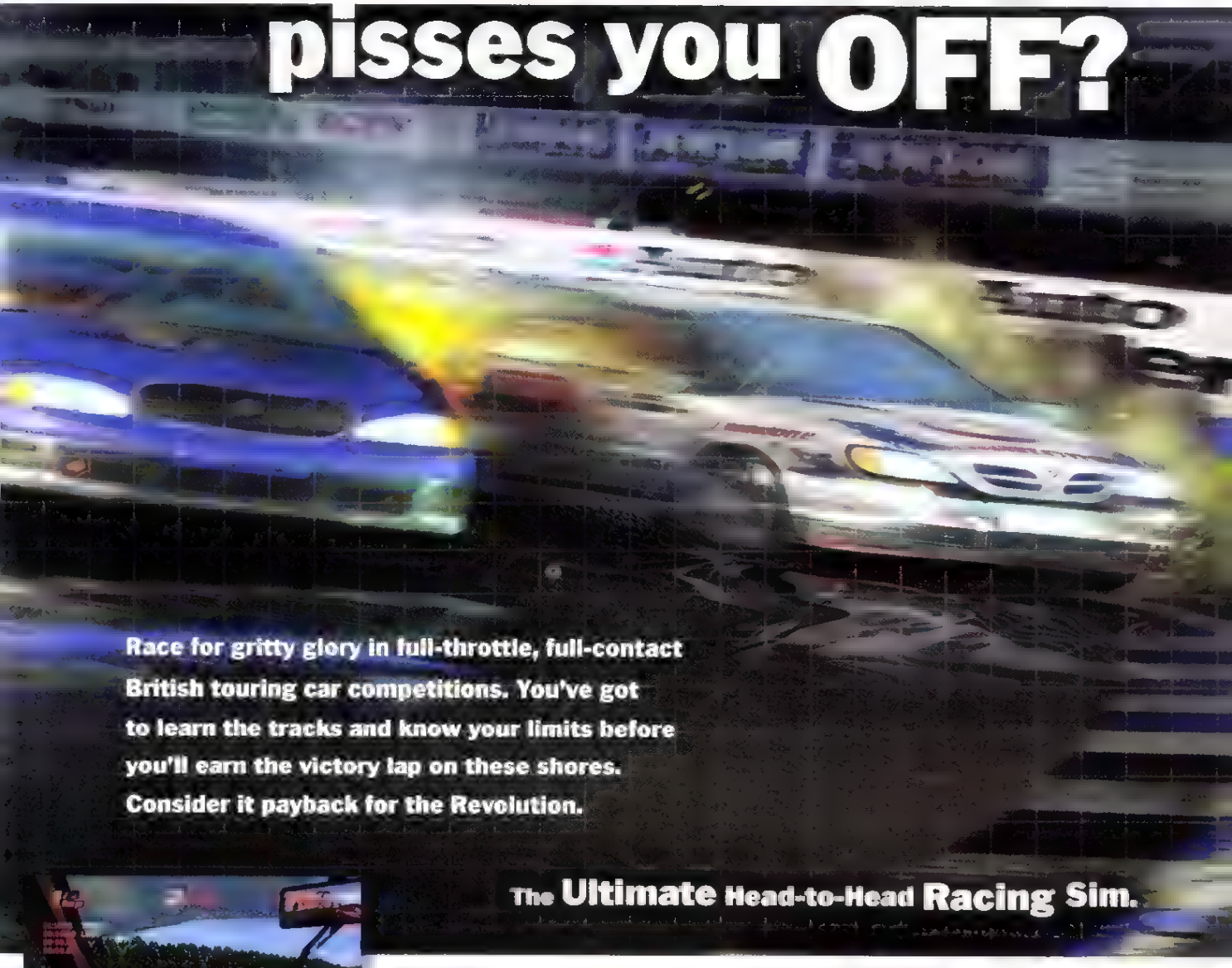

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Jane's USAF

Jane's hot new multi-aircraft combat sim packs a mighty wallop — and it's no easy horse to tame, either. Fortunately, the game's developers, Pixel Multimedia, are on hand to give you the inside combat briefing you need to stay alive and keep the old red, white, and blue flying high....

Preparing For a Mission

Take your time before jumping into the cockpit the first time you fly a mission. Here are the things you should pay attention to before pressing the "Fly" button:

Understanding the Mission and Situation

The initial, and very important phase of any mission is the brief. You have to understand exactly what is it that you are expected to do! Read the complete brief to understand the situational background and your role in the operation. Pay extra attention to the following sections:

1. TASKING: Since most of the missions and operations in *USAF* involve more than one wing, this section specifies the tasking for each of the wings. You must utilize this section to build a situational awareness during the mission. Situational orientation is understanding where and what each of the wings is supposed to do during the mission. This is sort of a God's-eye view over the combat theatre. The tactical display is a great tool to help you build this situational awareness. Check the routes of the different wings, the target and threat locations, and enemy air bases on the map (remember you can always check the tactical display by pressing the Esc key)

2. MISSION OBJECTIVES: This section in the brief specifies exactly what you need to achieve in order to succeed in the mission (usually targets that should be destroyed, and friendly assets to be protected). Concentrate on achieving the mission goals when you fly the mission. It is always very tempting to get rid of your air to ground ordnance and go into a dogfight with the threatening enemy wing in front of you. However, if your task is air to ground, abandoning your orders might be a big mistake that can ruin the whole operation. During flight, you can always display a list of mission objectives by pressing the "O" key.

3. INTELLIGENCE: In this section, you will find information about your targets, including air photos of your target with exact markings for the objects you should hit. Study these air photos carefully. Memorize how the different elements of the target are placed in the scenery. Learn how to locate the exact spot where you should aim your weapons when approaching the target area from different locations. Targets are heavily defended by SAMs and AAA — you don't want to circle over the target several times in order to locate it. After you have learned how to locate your targets, pay close attention to the threats specified in this section as well. Plan ahead so you will be prepared to deal with each threat type in case you have to.

Learn how to locate the exact spot where you should aim your weapons.

4. ROUTES AND THREATS: After the aircraft is selected and armed, we have to examine all the threats that might prevent us from achieving a mission success. The threats are usually enemy fighters, Surface to Air missiles (SAMs), and AAA. As we enter the threat issue, we pass from a single perspective to a wider one, that of several flights designated to do the job. We'll deal with this issue later. In the meantime, plan an ingress route to the target, and an escape plan. Take into account the height you will want to be flying as you approach the target, the terrain structure, the weather, and the direction that is best for the bombing run. Some targets can only be seen from a certain direction! Maybe there is a good canyon you can use to hide in while approaching the target, or a nice high mountain we can dive behind after the bombing run. If you need to, you can drag and move the waypoints on the tactical display to suit your new plans. Study the area around the target, and choose terrain pointers, relative to your target's position (e.g. a lake to the north of the target). Apart from these active threats, there are passive reasons — weather, malfunctions, and others. Try to visualize worst-case scenarios, and your way of dealing with them. It will make your job easier in the air.

Loadout

In general, the default loadout in the missions will do the job, but as old and alive pilots say, "never trust anyone...". Check the weapon configuration of your planes and make sure they suit your mission objectives and your individual preferences. Extra attention should be taken when flying the future campaign missions. Check the resource meters for availability of weapons. You can never know how long the campaign will last, so try to keep your inventory balanced. It

When planning a mission, make sure you clearly define your ingress route to the target, and an egress route from it — otherwise, you could waste precious mission time.

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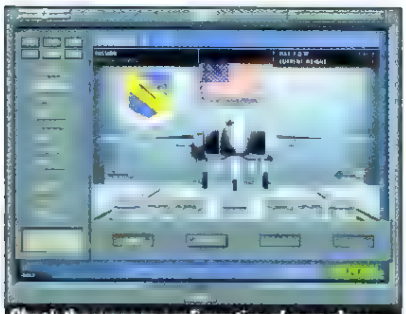


Check the weapon configuration of your planes and make sure they suit your mission objectives.

would not be a smart move to use up all your AIM 120s and AGM 130s in the first two missions. On the other side, do not "save" too many of your best weapons for future use, or the cost might well be losing some of your airplanes.

On Your Way to the Target

Some of the missions in *Jane's USAF* start in a situation where a few of the wings are very close to the action, so from the minute you sit in your cockpit, open your eyes and ears for surprises. Use the JDITS display to build situational awareness and listen to the ATC sitting in the AWACS for additional information regarding incoming threats. Use your radar to sweep the area you are flying into. It's a good idea to start with a TWS scan at 40 NM for a few seconds. If the area is clear then you may go into 80 NM LRS search to increase the detection range. Look ahead and avoid flying over military camps, roads, and enemy installations that may give your location away. If you're flying low, pick canyons and valleys on your way and fly through them. Terrain masking will make you harder to detect on your way to the target area. In every wing you are flying in, concentrate on the tasks and objectives that each wing needs to cover

Multi Flights Control

Jane's USAF comprises a tactical aspect by letting you fly up to four flights in a single mission. While it is essential to fly more than one flight to complete many of the missions, it is planned so that it is not necessary to switch every few seconds, making the feature a nuisance. The first thing you should do is pay attention to the flights' tasking section in the briefing. Every flight has its own role in the complete operation and is armed appropriately. Strike packs usually include a CAP (Combat Air Patrol) force, intended to clear the skies for the loaded attackers, and sometimes a Wild Weasel, or SEAD flight, for taking out ground threats such as SAM batteries and AAA guns. Mind you, the optimal order of flying the different flights is not always

A USAF F-15C launches an AIM-120 AMRAAM at an enemy contact — bye, bye, baby!

by their alphabetical order

During the flight, pay attention to messages coming from the other flights (such as "Austin IP inbound") in order to keep a picture of the mission's advance.

You should also check the Tactical Map from time to time in order to get a visual updated combat top-down view. Of course, the AI will fly the planes for you, but you can probably do it better! Make sure you are where the action is. Other wings will report "Fox" messages when firing missiles or report kills and losses to the ATC. As the player, it is a smart move to fly the wing that is currently in combat. You can either use the tactical display to check on the situation and decide what wing to fly, or if you know what wing you wish to fly, press Shift together with 1, 2, 3, 4 for Austin Buick Corvette and Dodge wings. The Multi-Flights feature actually enables you to fly different aircraft in each mission and to execute all the different mission's aspects. Even if you have been shot down, out of ammo or fuel in one flight, you nearly always have backups.

Air to Air Engagements

AA combats could be our main tasking, or a hindrance to our main mission objective. However, once we have decided to take out an enemy element, we should concentrate on doing so, regardless of the mission objectives. Use all the force you can get on the elements you're going up against because if you lose there will be no later engagements. As a rule of thumb, it is always better to be lower than your opponents. Your radar will be able to have a "Look Up" situation, which is better than a "Look Down" situation. Looking up will help you "tally" (visually identify an enemy) before the opponent can identify you. If you are going up against several elements, never fly toward the middle of the elements. Doing so will make you turn your tail and give an advantage to one of the elements. Always approach the elements only from one side.

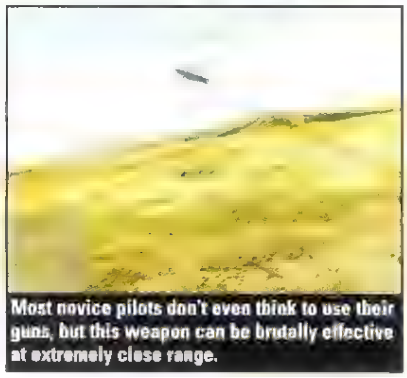
At a range of 20 miles, it's time to get rid of the external fuel tanks. Use Shift-C to drop them and give your wing the Alt-D command. Usually the best way to go into battle is in a wide spread line flight or a wide spread wedge. If you can use BVR weapons, give your wing the sort targets command (Alt-S). Each member will try to lock on a different target in the element. If you're going up against an advanced enemy wing like the Su-35, try to use two AIM 120 missiles against two targets. It's okay if your wing fires more than one missile per target. We do not want to take any chances with them.

AA Weapons Operation

Radar Missiles

It is important to make good use of your weaponry during interception and combat. Start with the Medium and Long-range radar missiles. Shoot the first missile a little after the target has entered the DLZ (Dynamic Launch Zone) so the missile has some spare energy. Put the Aim Dot at the center of the ASE (Allowable Steering Error) for best results. Most importantly, make sure you have the shoot-cue symbol below the TD-box as this means all the previous conditions are attained. If you are shooting a semi-active missile such as the AIM-7, you must stay locked on the target in STT (Single Target Track) until the end of the missile's flight. If it is an active missile such as the AIM-120, you can switch to another target as soon as the missile is fired. After firing the mis-

The AIM-9M is generally wing-mounted and a fearsome weapon if used correctly, as this F-16C is doing.


Most novice pilots don't even think to use their guns, but this weapon can be brutally effective at extremely close range.

sile, it is advisable to open some horizontal margin between you and your target for a comfortable interception rather than keep flying smack towards it.

The SRM (Short-Range Missile) is what you will shoot next. Try to make a nice round interception to the target's rear sector for best performance from your heat seekers. Old generation missiles like AIM 9B will detect the target only from a rear sector, but all aspect missiles like the AIM-9M will allow you to launch from a head-on aspect. Once inside the DLZ, wait for the heat detection's high pitched tone and fire. Stay with the target to see that the missile has hit it before moving on (or use the Missile view — F-11 key)

Guns

Switch to guns only when you are within a mile of the target. Further than that and the gun is ineffective, and the closer you get the easier it is to aim. Try to regulate your closure speed toward the target before firing. Make sure you are on the target's flight line, meaning your bore sight cross is directly in front of it. This means that you match your flight line with that of the enemy. Finally, place the piper just a bit behind the target, pull the trigger, and run the piper forward over the target. Make sure your gun bursts are short and efficient so you won't run out of bullets too soon. If the target's aspect angle is high, you might try a snap shot put the piper in front of the target, start shooting, and et the target pass through your line of fire Nothing is more satisfying than a nice, close-range guns kill.

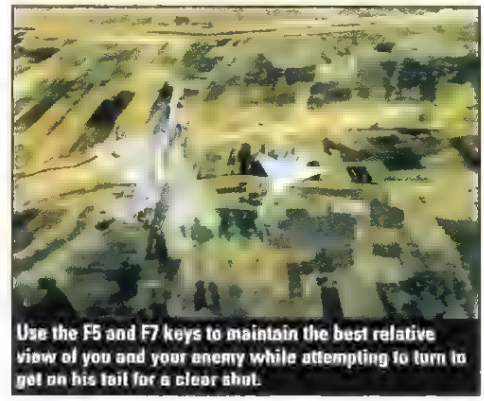
Dogfights

Where to Fly?

In close quarter dogfights, it is not always easy to understand the geometry and execute prec se maneuvers, such as a spiral dive, a high-speed yo-yo, or other moves. A good rule to follow is what the famous WWII Ace William B shop wrote, "When you don't know what to do, put your nose on your opponent's tail". If you keep turning toward the enemy while keeping a reasonable velocity, you are sure to improve your situation. The F5 and F7 views are perfect for this purpose

Engine Operation and G-force

A key factor in proper dogfighting is managing the physiolog'cal aspect. No pi ot can maintain a nine-G turn for more then a few seconds. Moreover, it might end in a few seconds of straight flight to stop a blackout in the better case, or crashing into the ground in the worse case. To prevent this you should monitor your G-force by making a gentler turn or preferably reducing your air speed. It's worth it to give up a few knots in order to maintain a steady turn. This may call for closing the throttle from time to time in the more powerful planes.


Use the F5 and F7 keys to maintain the best relative view of you and your enemy while attempting to turn to get on his tail for a clear shot.

Staying Alive in Air to Air Combat

The most important part of combat flying is survival. As the famous WWII Ace William Bishop wrote in one of his always-relevant ten rules for AA combat: "In air combat the losses and falls uphold the wins and kills". The AA threats you are faced with are of three kinds. Radar Guided Miss'les are f'red at you from long ranges (usually no less then three miles), Heat Seeking Missiles are used at close range (less then five miles), and in close quarter dogfights (un.ess you prevent it) enemy planes will fire their Guns at you from behind at very close ranges (a mile or less). Here's how to defend yourself from each one

Avoiding AA Radar-Guided Missiles

Some of the planes you face in *USAF* are equipped with long-range radar guided miss.les such as the AA-7 Apax and the AA-10 Alamo A. These missiles depend on a permanent radar lock to guide them to their target. In order to throw off such a missile, you must turn so that the missile is at a beam angle to you and release a coupie of chaffs. The turn to a beam angle makes it hard for the radar to keep its lock. Releasing chaff baffles it even more. If the 90-degree maneuver didn't work and the missile s getting closer, wait for the right moment — a few seconds before impact — and then break hard toward it. The missile might correct its flight path too late and explode at a safe distance from your plane. Mind you, timing is crucial for this maneuver. Do it too soon and you will get the miss'le head-on — too late and you wont have time to build a sufficient turn ratio.

Avoiding Heat Missiles

Heat missiles use a completely different system to home in on their target; therefore, the defense against them is completely different as well. Heat missiles detect and steer themselves independently toward the infrared emission of your engine. In order to deceive them, you should cut down the engine's heat by closing the throttle (the lower the RPMs the better), and then release a few flares. If your engine is cool enough, the flare will attract the missile's heat seeker and the missile will follow the flare. While doing this, you should also turn toward the missile. By enlarging your aspect toward the missile you are making it harder for it to detect your tailpipe's heat. This makes your situation better against all-aspect missiles and

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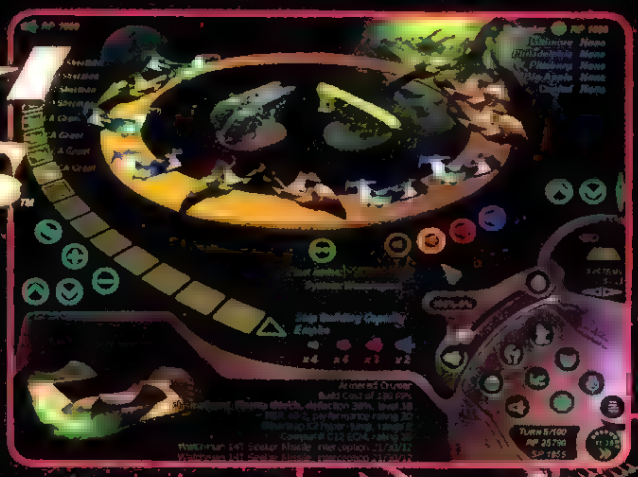

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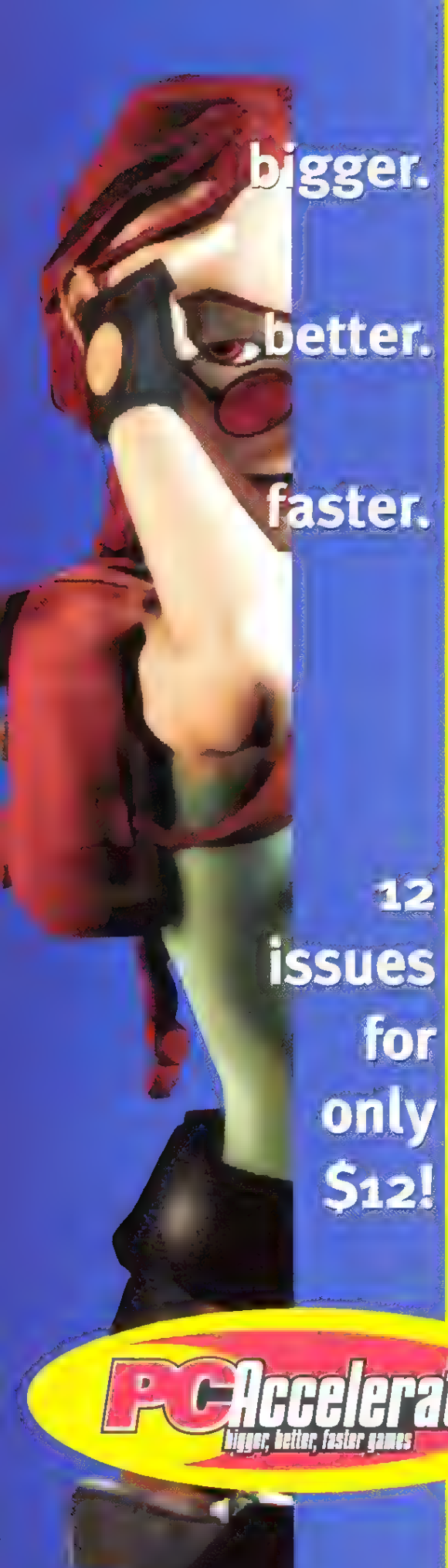

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surely against rear sector ones. Finally, when worse comes to worse, try the hard break to throw off the missile, as described in the previous paragraph.

Combined Maneuver

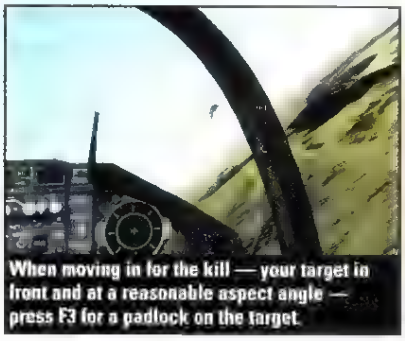
When a missile is fired at you head-on from 10 miles, you know it's radar guided. When it is shot from behind you at close range, it's a heat seeker. But what do you do when the case is not so clear; say an incoming missile from four miles behind? In that case, you have to do a combined maneuver to cover yourself against both cases. Close your throttle, turn 90 degrees to the threat, and release both chaff and flares. Don't spare chaff and flares; there might not be a later.

Anti Gun Maneuver

If a bandit has closed down on you within gun range, all is not lost yet. Try to throw him forward while keeping yourself out of his gun sight. Do this by reducing your engine, extracting the air brakes, and engaging in a series of turns and pulls he will find hard to follow Try rolling 90 degrees to one side, pulling as hard as you can, rolling another 90 degrees to the same side, another pull, and so on until the bandit slingshots past you. If you are at low altitude, do it by turning and breaking from side to side.

Views Operation in Air to Air Combat

The F5 view is the best for defensive action. For offensive action, you can do the following: after achieving a radar lock on your target, try to keep it in the HUD while in the cockpit or HUD views (F1). During the dogfight, try toggling between F7 for an outside player-to-target view and F1 to keep track of your flight data as long as the target is behind you. When moving for the kill — with the target in front and at a reasonable aspect angle — press F3 for a padlock on the target, place the arrow so it points straight up, and pull to bring your cockpit to the target. Be careful — it's hard to keep situational awareness in padlock view when the target is not generally in the front sector Use the canopy reflections to increase your situational awareness in the 3D cockpit. As the cockpit gets closer, the arrow shortens and you can get ready to switch to HUD view as soon as the target is in the HUD, for a nice wide-angle front view during the run.



When moving in for the kill — your target in front and at a reasonable aspect angle — press F3 for a padlock on the target.

This Iraqi nuclear plant is about to become history, as seen in the TV output of an incoming GBU-15 bomb.

Air to Ground Attack Options

How will you know what tactic to select and what weapon to use for each air-to-ground purpose? Here are three basic options and the logic behind them.

Stand-off Attack

As mentioned before, stand-off attacks are used to take out targets without entering the SAM-defended zone, using long-range guided weapons like Mavericks, GBUs, and HARMs. This is very useful to destroy SAM radars and clear a path for subsequent direct strikes, and for surgical strikes against intensely defended point targets.

High Altitude Attack

When you think the biggest threat is the AAA fire, execute a High Altitude Attack. Penetrate the target area at about 15,000' and perform your dive bomb to a minimum altitude of 6,000' AGL above the AAA's reach. It is advisable to take out the AAA guns first and relieve yourself of the limitation.

Pop-up Attack

When the major threat are SAMs, you want to be low and hidden for as long as possible. This is what the Pop-up Attack is for. Come in low until you are four miles and 45-degrees from the target, pull up to 8,000-10,000', and enter the dive bomb The shorter your exposure time, the less chance you have of being shot at.

AG Weapons

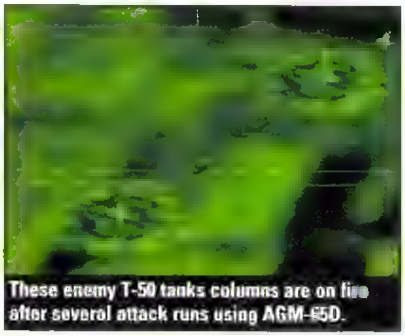
The USAF handles a large variety of Air to Ground weapons. Read the game manual and follow the training course in order to learn their correct operation The best way to pick out a target is to lock on it by AG radar and checking it in Target view (F4), as finding a vehicle on the ground from 15000' is practically impossible. Here are a few tips about the different weapons:

GBU-15

The Gliding Bomb Unit is a TV-guided, long-range, non-propelled bomb. It should be delivered from a high altitude to enable it to glide the distance it is intended for. Climb to about 20,000' at a high velocity and release the bomb as soon as the target enters its DLZ. Then turn the plane back and engage the autopilot in level mode. Switch to full screen MFD (Z key). From now on, concentrate on finding your target (you can see the "T" indicator), and precise aiming (using the CTRL and arrow keys)

AGM-65B/D — Maverick

The Maverick is a very handy and precise weapon thanks to its "fire-and-forget" qualities. Once in range, just toggle your radar lock from one target to another and let the Mavericks go to take out packs of ground targets. Or use the full screen MFD to achieve contrast lock on target without using the radar.

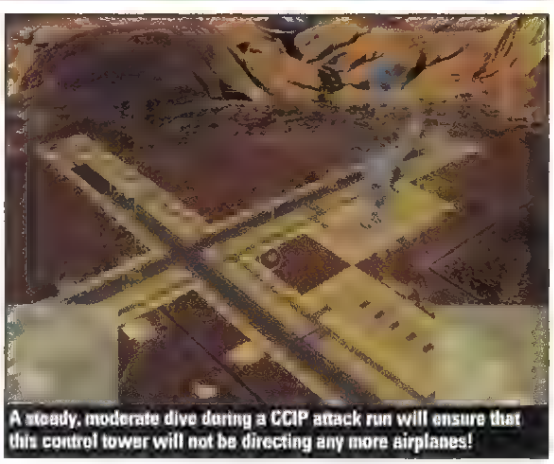


These enemy T-50 tanks columns are on fire after several attack runs using AGM-65D.

This SA10 radar installation is about to be blown into the sky by the AGM-88 HARM missile. So long, suckah!

HARM and Shrike

The Homing Anti-Radar Missile is most efficient against ground radars such as SAM radars and Gundish AAA vehicles. Don't come too close to the targets because they might fall out of the HARM's detection limits. If you are not sure you took out all the radars make a 360-degree turn or use the JDITS display ("T").


A steady, moderate dive during a CCIP attack run will ensure that this control tower will not be directing any more airplanes!

Laser Guided Bombs

Although you can manually direct the FLIR (Forward Looking InfraRed) and lock on targets, it is still easier to use the AG radar modes. When bringing your nose down to the target you should see the AG TD-box and the Laser TD-box on top of each other. Continue to execute a regular CCIP dive bomb. The FLIR guides the bomb to a precise hit but aiming the CCIP accurately can't hurt

CCIP Delivery

GP (General Purpose) and Cluster bombs require accurate aiming using the CCIP (Continuously Calculated Impact Point) mode. Sure, you can put the piper on the target at a ten degree dive, hold the pickle pressed, and let the computer release the bombs in the Delayed mode, but as in real life the hit would be much less accurate. In order to release the bombs immediately and accurately you need to perform a dive bomb at a dive angle of at least 30 degrees. Make sure you have enough altitude, see that the delay line disappears, aim and fire. Use the Weapon Camera (F11) to check your hits.

Gun

Strafing can be a lot of fun. Organize yourself for a comfortable 10 to 20 degree dive, wait patiently for the gun's effective range (under two miles), aim and pull the trigger. There's nothing to it.

Air to Ground Defense

Avoiding SAM

Surface to Air Missiles work by the same principles as radar guided AA missiles, therefore, the maneuver against them is the same (turn 90 degrees, chaffs, hard break). But while AA radars almost never lose their line of sight with their target, the SAM radar is on the ground. Flying low behind the mountains not only will prevent it from detecting you in the first place, it will also break the lock after a missile had been fired and save your butt. No radar in the world can "see" through mountains. Therefore, the most efficient means against a fired SAM would be to find quick shelter using the terrain. But if you were caught at high altitude or the terrain is flat and there is nowhere to hide then concentrate on the above-mentioned maneuver.

Flying the friendly (or not so friendly) skies has never been more fun than in *Jane's USAF*.

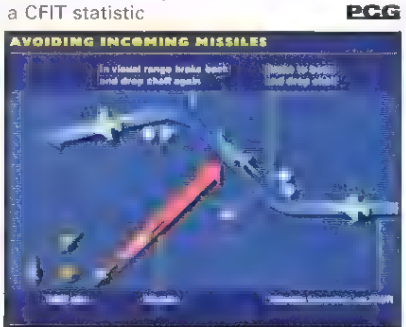
Avoiding AAA Fire

Contrary to SAMs, Automatic Anti Aircraft fire is short ranged, deadly at low altitudes, and very hard to hide from. The best way to avoid AAA fire is to fly above it. If you keep yourself above 5000' AGL (Above Ground Level) you should be safe. This is of course a problem when SAMs are also in the area, and you have to decide which is the more dangerous threat. If, however, you are caught in AAA fire, get away from there as fast as you can, either by climbing to a safe altitude or by flying out of its "kill range". At the same time, execute a series of high-G break turns in order to make the aiming difficult for the gunners

Avoiding the Ground

After all that has been said, it is important to mention that the number one pilot killer is not enemy planes or SAMs but rather CFIT (Controlled Flight Into Terrain). While defending yourself from all these threats, don't forget to pay attention to your altitude, especially when flying low and using outside views such as F5, F7, and padlock. When flying low keep your eyes forward and your vector velocity above the highest obstacle before you. Don't become a CFIT statistic

PCG



The *USAF* training briefs and manual contain dozens of drawings that explain different aspects of air combat, such as this SAM avoidance sketch. Study them carefully.

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LETTERS

This month's mailbag was positively overflowing with well-written and insightful commentary, proving that *PC Gamer* readers are a cut above the rest. Keep those letters coming!

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! Write to us at: PC Gamer Letters, Imagine Media, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005 or E-mail us at: peeceegee@aol.com or editor@pcgamer.com.

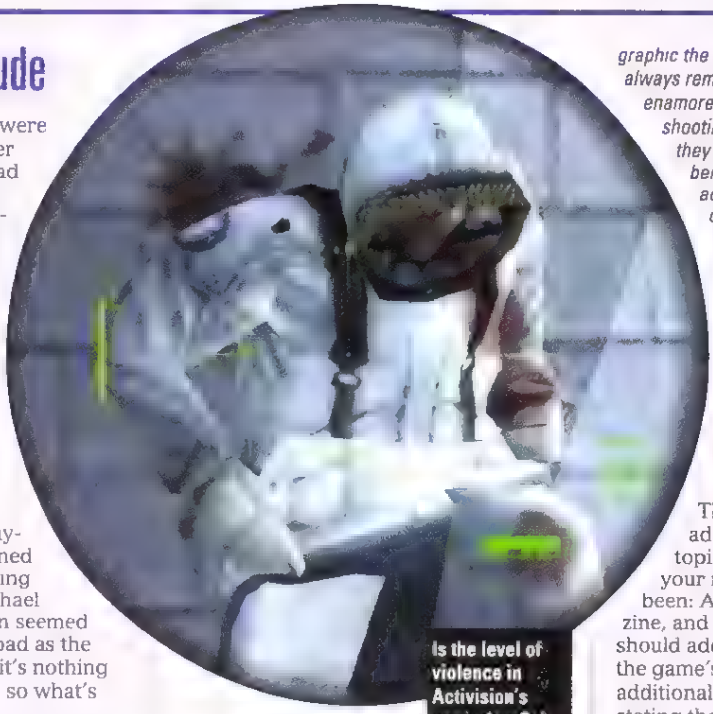
The Past is Prelude

I love *PC Gamer*, but there were three things in your October issue that made me, well, sad. The first was reader Zack White's apology in your letter column for being upset at the violence portrayed in the recent *Kingpin* ad. I'm glad you folks told him that to feel that way was okay. But at the same time (and here's the second sad thing), you ran an article about the upcoming *Soldier of Fortune* game, saying how fascinated your staff was by the realistic gore. Yet, there was no mention of anyone on your staff being turned off by it. And finally (sad thing #3), we have columnist Michael Luton, whose whole column seemed to carry the thesis that, as bad as the violence is in some games, it's nothing compared to the real thing, so what's the big deal?

Here's the big deal: The computer gaming industry better wake up to the fact that it's no more bullet-proof than the characters in its own games. Is this really what the gaming industry is focused on: more and more gore until it equals or eclipses the "real thing?" I hope not, Mr. Luton.

The focus should be on creating great games! If great games depended on realistic violence, *The Curse of Monkey Island* wouldn't be a great game; *Thief* wouldn't be a great game; not even the original *Tomb Raider* would be a great game. It's excitement, fun, and thrills that should be the focus of game creators — not gore. The more creators focus on gore, the more dangerous it will be for the future of the gaming industry.

Remember the old maxim, "those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it?" I used to be a professional comic book writer. I suggest the makers of ultra-violent PC games study what happened to the comics industry back in the 1950s. It, too, was an industry that, in some isolated spots, had creative folk whose sole purpose seemed to be to fill adventures with gore. Their antics ruined it for the entire industry. The bad press they created resulted in a government inquiry into the "morality" of the entire industry. Publishers went out of business, careers were ruined and, ultimately, a ridiculous form of censorship called "The Comics Code" turned the industry into mush.



Is the level of violence in Activision's upcoming *Soldier of Fortune* over the top? Our reader Greg Potter seems to think so.

Zack White should not only have been told that it's "okay" to feel the way he does -- he should be downright praised for voicing what many of us feel. Game creators who create simply for the gore of it are dangerous — dangerous to the industry they work for and dangerous to the fans who love great gaming.

Don't get me wrong: I don't advocate censorship. But I do advocate creators waking up and realizing what, in the long run, they're doing to us all. I also advocate *PC Gamer* getting someone on their staff with the same view as Mr. White and myself, so that both sides of this debate could be heard on a more regular basis. Great truths aren't uncovered by people who all subscribe to the same religion — and great magazines aren't created by staffs who all think that realistic violence is "awesome, man!"

—Greg Potter, *via the Internet*

We have a very diverse group of staff members here with a wealth of differing opinions on every subject. One thing we all agree on, though, is that these are games, and no matter how graphic the violence in them gets, they will always remain games. And not everyone here is enamored with how much blood can be seen shooting out of the victim's arteries, but they would never dream of criticizing or berating a co-worker that thought it added to the appeal of the game — different strokes, as they say. We don't mean to sound callous or cavalier in this regard, but there's a very simple solution — if you don't like the content of a particular game, then don't buy it and/or play it. It's the same for books, movies, and anything else under the sun.

"Extreme" Ads

The complaints against violent ads seems to be a consistent topic in your letters section, and your responses pretty much have been: A) this is not a children's magazine, and B) those with complaints should address the issue directly with the game's publisher. You made an additional point in the October issue stating that it's good that the ads accurately depict the graphic nature of the game so that the buyer is not surprised by what he or she gets.

I agree with all three of these points; however, there remains the question of, "at what point is the ad *too* violent, hateful, sexual, satanic, etc.?" Does *PC Gamer* have any standards for their ads at all? It is, after all, *your* magazine and you can refuse to sell ad space to any ad you wish. You can't pass the blame on to the game publishers — they have to meet *your* standards if they want space in your magazine. Is it simply a matter of, "as long as the ad doesn't get us an X-rating (and therefore not allow us to sell to our under-18 market), we'll run any ad that pays our price"?

There are only one or two ads per issue that could be considered "extreme" — would *PC Gamer* really lose those advertisers if it simply asked them to "tone it down"? If you continue to publish *any* ad in pursuit of the almighty dollar, what's the difference between you and the game publishers you deride for rushing incomplete products to the shelves just to capture more revenue?

I'm afraid that *PC Gamer* will not take any action until you see a substantial loss in subscription revenues. Even then, the subscription loss will probably be misinterpreted as a comment on your editorial content and not your ad content

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— a writer or two will be let go, the mag will be revamped, but the extreme ads will always continue because *PC Gamer* is too afraid of lost revenues to take a stand on what goes in the magazine

This would be a shame, because it is obvious the high caliber of individuals that make up the *PC Gamer* team — you don't just put out a good computer game magazine, you put out a damn good magazine! The quality of your writers and editors is outstanding, and all of the articles are both informative and highly entertaining. Just the fact that you print dissenting letters demonstrates your magazine's integrity. To read your magazine is like taking a leisurely walk through a field with friends — unfortunately, you can't enjoy the walk for all the horse manure you're constantly stepping in. Can't you do something to clean it up a little?

—Russell Ide, *via fax*

Thanks for the kind words Russell (except for that horse manure part, of course). Yes, advertisers do have to meet our standards (well, our advertising department's standards anyway — we editors stay as far away from this area as we possibly can) but as always, it comes down to each individual. You state that there are only "one or two ads per issue" that you take exception to. But maybe there are people reading the magazine that find 20 or 30 ads offensive in some way. Whose standards should we meet? Obviously, the people in charge of approving the ads that appear in the magazine have a different opinion on what they find offensive. Have you ever considered the possibility that we do reject certain ads — ads that would make your toes curl in disgust? It's important to remember that what one person may find appalling may not even register on someone else's radar.

Jacking the Jackal

I've noticed that Jay Vidheecharoen, or "The Jackal" as he is known at your office, has developed a menacing attitude toward my beloved *PCG* staff. I am warning you now — strike back before it is too late! If you do not, you will all perish when the hour of The Jackal is upon you! Here is what I suggest you do; have Greg tackle him and tie him to an office chair. From there, you can administer various tortures such as placing him in close proximity to Billy after his burgerthon, or wheeling him into the middle of the *PC Accelerator* office and leaving him to succumb to the mind-numbing atmosphere that seems to linger there. Whatever you do to him, make sure he realizes that there are consequences to interfering with the Gaming Goodness that goes on in the *PCG* office.

"You'll all pay for your foolishness!" Normally, this is the part we tell you that Jay is not really bitter and misanthropic — unfortunately, we can't do that.

—Jay Campbell, *Bozeman, MT*

The Jackal responds: I can't be stopped! You can only hope to contain me! Billy and Wolf have already been eliminated, and it won't be long before the rest of these suckers rue the day they messed with me!

Five, Six, Bleem, Seven...

In your October issue, you mention a new product called *bleem!* and no one seems to know the origin of the name Here's a guess — in an old George Carlin monologue, he claims that, "Scientists at Berkeley have discovered a new number. They say the number is bleem, and it should go between six and seven." It's the only other time I've heard bleem maybe Randy Linden will confirm, so we can all sleep better.

—John Slupski, *via the Internet*

Sorry John — we already thought of that one and it's not it. Randy's partner Dave Herpolsheimer has scoured the Internet looking for references to the word, but every time he thinks he's onto something, Randy shoots him down. The world may never know

Kudos for the *Kingpin* Review

In the October issue you guys really proved that you could review games. Giving *Kingpin: Life of Crime* a winging review of 53 percent finally brought justice to such a crap filled game. Profanity and blocky models, weak AI, and interminable load time are what this real winner is made of. I have to thank you for bringing this to light. *PC Gamer*'s reviews are always top notch. You guys are doing a bang up job - keep it up.

—Mike, *via the Internet*

Thanks, Mike. We call 'em as we see 'em, and we didn't like a lot of what we saw in Kingpin. It was a real disappointment, too — so many of us were really looking forward to that game

A New Challenge

First, I would like to applaud Mr. Harms on his Herculean feat of consuming four Ultimates. I personally know the Ultimate, and one is a worthy foe for any digestive system, let alone four. Still, I have another challenge for you: The Taco Bell Grande Meal!

This bane to all stomachs consists of a Mexican pizza, Nachos BellGrande, and 10 soft tacos, crunchy tacos, or bean burritos all for a reasonable battle fee of $9.99. My friend, Matt Tong, who is no large man by any means, managed to overtake this entire platter a few weeks ago. He used the strategy of first putting the Nachos BellGrande out of its misery, then sucking down five hard tacos, taking on the Mexican Pizza, scarfing 4 more hard tacos and topping it all off with a bean burrito. This last piece of Tex/Mex fury had to be forcibly shoved down his throat, but he claimed the Mexican Pizza was the true test of courage for him

Be warned! After this meal, Mr. Tong spent two hours sacrificing the new occupants of his stomach to the porcelain gods and refused to eat anything for days. Does anyone dare accept the challenge?

—D, *via the Internet*

This sounds like quite a challenge, D. None of us here is sure we want to spend days driving the bus, but we do know that Dean is a Taco Bell fanatic. We have already started to pressure him into taking this challenge; we'll let you know if he's man enough to do it. PCG

We hate it when a highly anticipated game like *Kingpin: Life of Crime* doesn't live up to our expectations — but we'll never hesitate to give you our honest opinions in our reviews.

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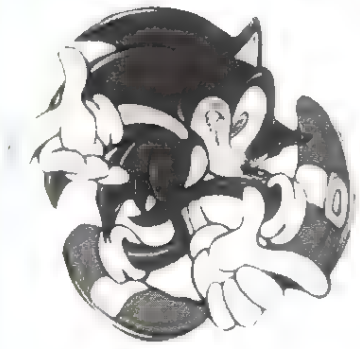

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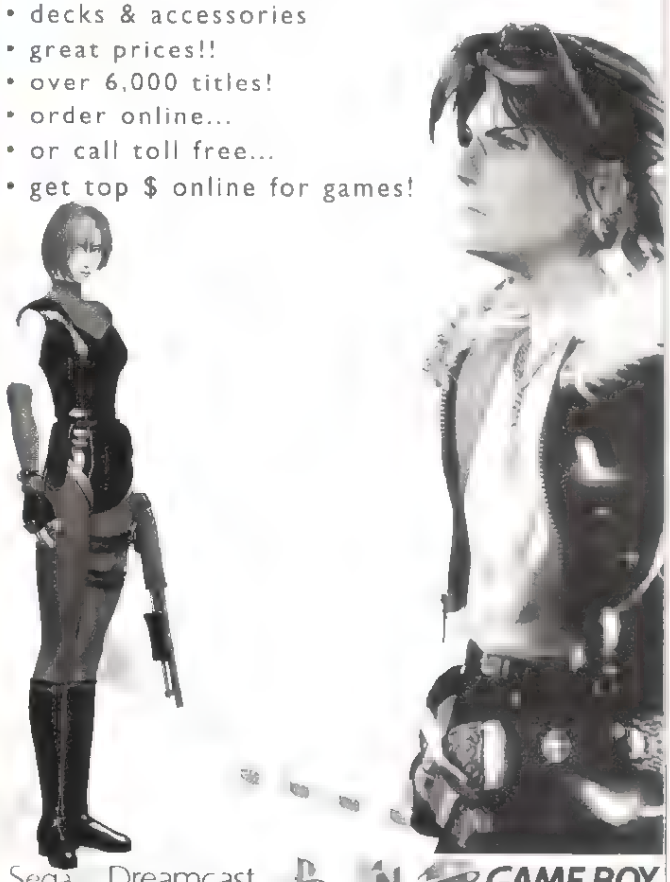

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He's the man, among the other game-design sages at Blizzard Entertainment, to thank for* WarCraft II, StarCraft, *and* Diablo. *And, much to our benefit, he's agreed to take a few minutes out from finishing* Diablo II *to be bombarded by the increasingly infamous* PC Gamer *Questionnaire. Ladies and germs,

BILL ROPER

How the devil are you?
An appropriate question since we're working like demons to get *Diablo II* out the door!

What was the first computer game you ever played?
Not counting the vintage *Pong* console machine that I kick myself for letting my parents throw in the trash when I was in high school, I believe it was the classic text-based game *Adventure*.

How did you get into the games industry?
I started by doing music and voice-over work at Blizzard back in 1994. I came in willing to do anything from quirky Orc voices to washing windows.

What's the worst game you've ever been involved in making?
When I was in college, a friend of mine and I created this game called, "Six-Pack, Six Minutes." A very, very bad idea.

What are you most likely to complain about while in a hotel?
No console games in my room! Either that or the fact that none of the movies work on the pay-per-view system — that always seems to happen.

What do you have in your pockets right now?
Wallet, keys, and my hand, of course (since I'm checking to see what is in my pockets).

What game are you playing right now?
I just finished a rousing game of *WarCraft II* since we're working on testing release candidates for *WarCraft II Battle.net Edition*.

What's the best game you've played recently?
System Shock 2 — engaging, moody, and fun.

And the worst?
Since I'm a devoted reader of *PC Gamer*'s reviews, I never play a bad game!

What is the greatest moment in the history of gaming?
Objectively: The introduction of the home computer. Subjectively: Every time I beat a twelve year-old at *anything*.

Who's your favorite game character?
I have to pick one hero and one villain: In the role of our hero is Zeratul from *StarCraft*. An anti-hero scorned by the same species that eventually looks to him for salvation, he never falters on the journey down his chosen path. On the other side of the coin, I can't resist the undead pirate LeChuck. He's a cruel taskmaster, carries a grudge, and has the greatest theme music of any character in any game, ever. What's not to like?

If there was one thing about gaming and the games business that you could smite with one mighty blow?
The tendency to release games before they are ready. There's nothing more disappointing than salivating over a game for years, only to play it and know that another few weeks of polish would have taken it from bad to good or good to great.

Pick five words to describe yourself.
Dedicated. Exuberant. Extroverted. Artistic. Amused.

What music would you have played at your funeral?

I've always thought that the funeral processions in New Orleans were the way to go out. Great Jazz played in celebration of the times that were shared, not dirges morning the loss. Irish wakes are also events based on spirited music and fond remembrances, so make it a jam session from County Cork to Bourbon Street.

"When I was in college, a friend of mine and I created this game called, 'Six-Pack, Six Minutes.' A very, very bad idea."

Game violence: media hype or legitimate concern?
Do I think games incite people to commit violent acts? No. Should parents be in the decision-making process of what games their kids are playing? Definitely, yes. A combination of responsible marketing on the part of game companies, enforcement of ESRB ratings, and parental involvement addresses the issue well.

Online gaming: over-rated fad or inexorable future?
Definitely the future of our industry. As computers continue to increase in power while decreasing in price, and the connectivity to the Internet becomes better and more economical around the world, we will continue to see gamers reach out in search of others with whom to share their experiences.

What game do you wish somebody would make?
An online world that is as compelling to adventure in as it is to interact within. While we're starting to see games where hundreds and thousands of people are playing with each other, the games themselves could be so much more. Imagine a game that constantly threw new challenges and events at you while urging you to join in a community that interacted with it, as opposed to just killing monsters while chatting. PCG

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The footsteps were getting louder with every passing moment. Rex Havoc had precious little time to make himself scarce if he was going to avoid being seen. Slipping into a dark corner at the end of the hall, the Sergeant retrieved a small metal container from his shirt pocket with one hand, drew his silenced .357 Desert Eagle with the other, and still managed to fire up a butt in the process.

Hidden in the shadows, the Sergeant had a clear view of the corridor, and he would soon know to whom the echoing footsteps belonged. "I knew this thing seemed too damned easy," Rex muttered under his breath.

He was right about one thing — it *had* been easy, but only because it had been made easy for him....

TO BE CONTINUED...

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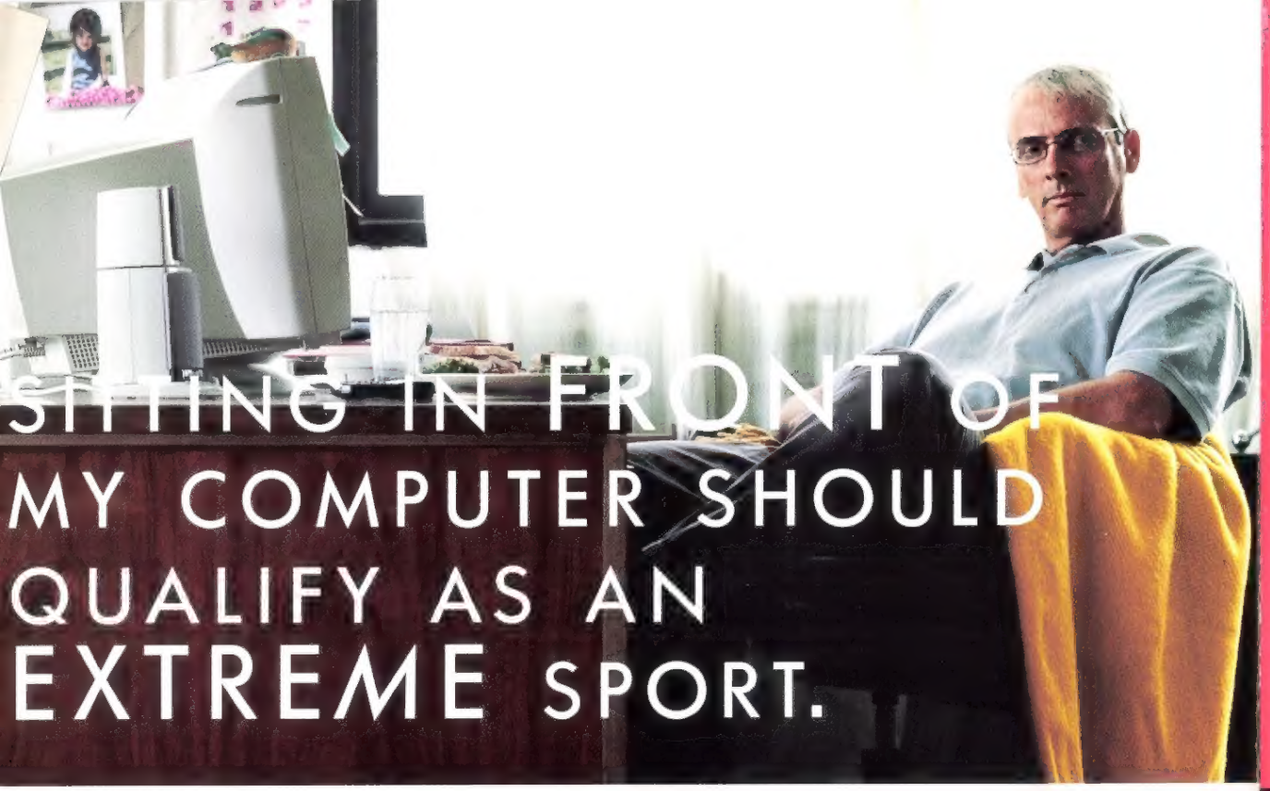

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